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## The country we are supposed to be

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2012

### **document version**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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### **citation for published version (APA)**

Welschen, S. I. (2012). *The country we are supposed to be: Born free South Africans talk about their nation*. [PhD-Thesis - Research and graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam]. In eigen beheer.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

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## **One country, two different moments**

South Africa, October 2007. A random pick of newspaper headlines that week: *'The whole country is behind the Boks, says Mbeki'* (The Witness, 20.10.07), *'Duisende Wag op Bokke, sommige slaap by lughawe om hulle te sien'* (*'Thousands await the Boks, some sleep at the airport to see them'*, Beeld, 24.10.07), *'Bok Mbeki – a cause for hope'* (The Witness, 27.10.07), *'Go Bokke, Go! – KZN gets behind the team'* (The Witness, 20.10.07), *'Boks shirts sell out'* (The Witness, 20.10.07).

On the evening of October 20<sup>th</sup> 2007, the 'Springboks' or 'the Boks' – the South African national rugby team – won the Rugby World Cup in a thrilling final against the English team in Paris. When the final whistle blew, the country erupted in jubilant celebrations that were to continue in the following days. Television stations kept broadcasting the images of the celebrating rugby team, carrying both the Cup and President Mbeki on their shoulders. For days afterwards, the streets were adorned with people sporting Springbok jerseys and South African flags being waved from car windows. The news media reported extensively on the arrival of the rugby team back on home soil. Hundreds of fans had waited for hours in the night to give their sports heroes a warm welcome. Commentators emphasised the fact that the crowd consisted of people of all colours. The identity constructed in these reports was that of a nation that was celebrating more than just the achievement of an important sports victory. It was an image of a nation that was celebrating an intense moment of togetherness, and savouring that moment for as long as it would last. An image of a nation that breeds success, proudly taking its place on the international stage.

South Africa, May, 2008. Another selection of headings from the local newspapers: *'Xenophobia hits South Africa's standing'*, *'I really hate your country'* (both Mail and Guardian, May 30<sup>th</sup> to June 5<sup>th</sup> 2008), *'Weekend attacks on Foreigners kill 12'* (The Witness May 19<sup>th</sup> 2008).

During the course of just a few weeks in May 2008, widespread violence against primarily African migrants had spread like wildfire across the country's townships, leaving over 60 people dead and thousands displaced. The attacks had started in the township of

Alexandra near Johannesburg and soon spread to other townships around Johannesburg, Cape Town, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. Although xenophobic violence is not new to South Africa, the May 2008 attacks stood out for their scale and intensity. The violence was concentrated in informal housing settlements in which fifty percent of all inhabitants live below the poverty line (Human Sciences Research Council 2008:14). The primary victims of the attacks were Africans from neighbouring countries, notably Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique. International media coverage of the attacks was extensive. The confronting image of 'the burning man', the Mozambican who was set on fire, circulated around the globe. Images of mobs of angry young men carrying torches, out to loot and burn to the ground the humble residences of migrant workers dominated the newspapers. When the attacks died down, their repercussions continued with UNHCR refugee sites being set up across the country and migrants queuing up for protection at police stations. The image emerging from these events was diametrically opposite that of October 2007. This was an image of a nation marked by violent conflict, deprivation, fear, grinding poverty and discrimination: an image that resulted – according to the newspaper headlines – in a stained international reputation. 'South Africa is disgusted with itself', reads an international newspaper quote (Spiegel Online, 27.05.2008). The intense public response to the attacks within South Africa reflected these sentiments of confusion, shame and soul searching. Reports followed of local communities mobilizing against the attacks, begging the migrants to return and promising to ensure their safety (Spiegel Online, 27.05.2008). Commentators speculated about the causes of the attacks, and reopened debates about the boundaries of belonging in South Africa. Politicians emphasized the contradiction between these events and South Africa's self-chosen identity: 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it; foreigners have helped to develop the economy of the country – we cannot be seen as attacking them' (Home Affairs Minister Mapisa-Nqakula, cited on news24.com, 2008). At the same time, organizations of refugees and independent researchers pointed out that the events had been 'a long time coming' and were symptoms of a more general practice of ill-treatment of foreigners in South Africa (Landau et al. 2004).

### **Nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa**

I happened to be living in South Africa studying national identity formation at the time when these two very different events occurred, and I witnessed the extreme shift in the 'national mood' that they triggered. In my view, this signalled something fascinating and theoretically important about national identification. It illustrated how the meaning of national identity develops in highly erratic patterns in reaction to large scale, newsworthy events. It showed how one and the same nation can manifest jubilant national pride and

confidence in one moment and an overwhelming sense of an identity crisis in the next. This striking phenomenon is the core theme of this dissertation. Within this area of interest, I will focus specifically on how ordinary people make sense of such distinct events in relation to their national identity. The underlying motivation for this study is a more general interest in the development of a collective national identity in post-apartheid South Africa. As a Master's student, I had studied the South African truth and reconciliation commission process from a perspective of transitional justice. The key question that remained unanswered in that study was whether in the longer run South Africans would be able to develop the type of 'thick reconciliation' that was being aimed for, a reconciliation that would allow for a durable sense of social cohesion, mutual responsibility and of belonging together as fellow nationals.

With the historic first democratic elections of 1994, South Africa made the transition from apartheid and oppression to democracy and political freedom. That was, however, only the first step on the long road towards a sense of collective identity and social cohesion among a population that had been internally divided for centuries. The historical legacy of the apartheid system inevitably weighs upon any consideration of the theme of national-identity construction in the South African context. When the country became a democracy in 1994, it emerged from an institutionalized, legislated system of racial oppression and segregation that excluded people of colour from political power and maintained white minority rule. Within this system, identity politics played a central role. The system of segregation, so central to the logic of apartheid, operated on the basis of rigid racial and ethnic identity categories. Flowing from this system were legalized and institutionalized spatial boundaries between different groups, and a definition of rights and duties of each group. The result of this system on the collective imagination of the country's population was powerfully described by Alistair Sparks in 1990:

The world is familiar with the apartheid division that runs through South African society, separating its white and black living areas, its schools, its social amenities, its political institutions, its trains, buses, taxis, ambulances, hospitals, its cemeteries even. But what is deeper than any of these is the division that runs through the psyche of the nation [...]. Two minds, two worlds, one country [...] where people occupy the same space but live in different time frames so that they do not see each other and perceive different realities. (Sparks 1990: xvii)

Social segregation thus came to play a central role in the formation of collective identities in South Africa, with race being the primary marker to draw boundaries between different groups (Zegeye, Lieberberg and Houston 2000:159). The categories of nationhood and national identity were equally interpreted along racially exclusive lines, distinguishing the enfranchised white nation from disenfranchised black African, 'Coloured' and Indian

nations or 'volkere'. The 'national question' – the struggle around the content of nationhood – was one of the most contested issues in the apartheid era (Alexander 2003:55).

It is in this historical context that post-apartheid South African leaders embarked upon their political project of building a united, cohesive South African nation: an ambitious aim given the complex and historically charged point of departure. It was clear from the statements of the first democratic president, Nelson Mandela, that the post-apartheid nation-building project would mark a radical break with the segregationist projects of the past. Building on the tradition of the 1955 Freedom Charter, the emphasis would be on inclusion, on the fostering of a sense of unity whilst at the same time celebrating the country's diversity. This dual aim was eloquently captured in the metaphorical construction of South Africa as a 'Rainbow Nation', a metaphor coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu<sup>1</sup> but swiftly taken up both in the political and in the broader public domain. The core idea behind this metaphor is that a Rainbow is made up of several distinct colours that nevertheless compose one unified band of light.<sup>2</sup> In his inauguration speech of May 10<sup>th</sup> 1994, Mandela described the new nation that was to be built along these lines:

We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity – a Rainbow Nation at peace with itself and the world.

The same inclusive aspiration was formulated in key documents that formed the institutional basis of post-apartheid South Africa. For example, the South African Constitution of 1996 opens with this phrase, borrowed from the 1955 Freedom Charter: 'We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white'. The message of inclusive nation-building was further spread through more popular channels like the media, the business world and the advertising industry. One instance is the repetitive jingle of the South African public service broadcaster (SABC 1) that sings: '*Simunye*', meaning 'we are one'.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Tutu's perspective on the new South Africa; see *Desmond Tutu: No future without forgiveness* (2000).

<sup>2</sup> As Evans notes, the metaphor also has a biblical connotation, as it recalls 'biblical references to Noah and the flood, in which the Rainbow served as a sign of God's oath never to wreak vengeance on humanity again' (Evans 2010:309).

But the project of redefining collective identities would entail much more than a smart public campaign. The transition to democracy and the far-reaching changes in power relations that it brought confronted ordinary South Africans of all backgrounds with the need to redefine and renegotiate their own identities and those of others. These processes unfolded against the backdrop of a dramatically changing social world around them. After 1994, South Africans found themselves interacting in neighbourhoods, schools, public amenities and other social arenas, places that until then had been strictly segregated along the lines of race. Meanwhile, the domains of state governance and the public service underwent sweeping changes away from white minority rule to reflect the actual composition of the South African population (Southall 2004:539). Outside the world of politics the changes in power relations were becoming equally visible. In the 'new' South Africa, the boundaries of social economic privilege no longer correspond with the boundaries of whiteness, and the black elite and middle classes are growing fast. In this context, Seekings and Natrass (2002:25) point out that 'inequality is increasingly a function of class, not of race [...]'. Residential areas that were previously exclusively for whites have become increasingly diverse. In another domain, the composition of student populations has changed dramatically in schools and universities across the country.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the post-apartheid era has seen a stubborn continuity of patterns from the apartheid past. Studies have documented how the legacy of the apartheid past continues to shape everyday life. The primacy of race as an identity category has continued well into the post-apartheid context, and the racial communities artificially forged in the past continue to 'inform day to day norms of what it is to belong to a community' (Gibson and Gouws 2003:14, Distiller and Steyn 2004:7). Not only do most South Africans continue to describe themselves in racial or ethnic terms (Gibson and Gouws 2003), but questions of race are still central in the public debate and voting behaviour continues to follow racial lines (Adam and Moodley 2000, Norris et al. 2008). Despite the upward mobility of members of previously disadvantaged communities, social integration across racial dividing lines in South Africa has proven difficult (Erasmus 2005). The increasing body of research into 'apartheid geographies' shows a picture of continuing residential segregation, with post-apartheid cities resembling their segregated apartheid predecessors (Christopher 2001, Ballard 2004, Tredoux and Dixon 2009). Scholars point to the development of new forms of division, avoidance and exclusion, for example the trend of living in so called 'gated communities' (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002:195), which Ballard (2004) describes as 'semigration'. There is very little movement of people, ideas and resources between these divided

neighbourhoods. What was once institutionalized legal segregation has been replaced by a phenomenon described by Goldberg as 'privatized segregation' (Goldberg 2011).

On a socio-economic level, South Africa remains a country with extremely unequal living standards. Terreblanche observes:

Eight years after the political transition, changes in the distribution of socio-economic power have mainly benefitted the ± 10 million blacks in the two bourgeois classes, and has had hardly any effect on the 22,5 million blacks in the middle lower and lower classes' (Terreblanche 2002:35).

Writing specifically about the youth, Bray and co-authors (2010) emphasize that the contrast between children growing up in extraordinarily affluent circumstances and highly impoverished rural or urban street children is enormous. These two dramatically different worlds of experience no longer squarely correspond to white and black realities. That said, it remains a given that poverty still overwhelmingly has a black face (Erasmus 2005). By contrast, as Jansen (2009:29) writes, 'whites have accumulated assets on the back of race that yield advantage to successive generations into the foreseeable future'. All of this suggests that the process of closing the psychological division described by Sparks entails a lot more than simply opening the ballot box to the entire population. It is a process that is ongoing in South Africa, and one that might never be accomplished as old dividing lines are replaced by new ones. For these reasons, some observers have critically remarked that 'a transcendent national identity remains an empty shell when it is merely declared on an abstract, political level, whilst real-lived, everyday experiences remain vastly divided' (Chidester et al. 2003:11, Maré 2005:8-9). Distiller and Steyn warn us that:

We need to deal with the contradictions in the lived experiences of civic subjects in South Africa in order to resist the invocation of 'the nation' in a way which, in obscuring or papering over contradictions, serves to prolong structural inequality (Distiller and Steyn 2004:7).

### **A sense of national identity against the odds**

As an outside observer living in South Africa, the question dominating my thoughts was: to what extent do ordinary South Africans feel a sense of community with their fellow nationals in spite of these pervasive divisions? Do they experience a sense of collective identity 'against the odds'? If so, how do they reconcile that collective identity with this background of spatial and socio-economic segregation that is obvious even to the less informed observer?

One place to look for answers to these questions is the studies that have measured the development of national identity among South Africans through longitudinal survey studies. The overall conclusions are remarkably consensual: in the first ten years of democracy, South Africans have developed a strong sense of identification with the South

African nation and a strong sense of inclusive South African nationhood (Mattes 2002, Klandermans, Roefs and Olivier 2001, Grossberg, Struwig and Pillay 2006, Futurefact 2004, Mattes 2004). International comparative studies show that South Africans have a higher sense of national identity than nationals of most other nation-states (Afrobarometer series 1995-2000, Pillay, Roberts and Rule 2006, Smith and Kim 2006).

What emerges from the discussion so far is a puzzling picture of remarkably high levels of national identification and national pride, and predominantly segregated everyday realities. A pressing question presenting itself is how these two facts relate to each other, and how South Africans make sense of their national identity in relation to the specific everyday realities that they find themselves in. From what has been discussed so far, it is clear that contradictions are a central feature in these processes. As Soudien points out:

The discursive map of South Africa is [...] a complex web of sometimes discrete and discontinuous themes, sometimes overlapping and synchronous ideals, and frequently contesting and contradicting notions of self and other (Soudien 2001:313).

### **The 'born free' generation: growing up in a free South Africa**

What specifically interested me within this broader context was the position of young South Africans. South Africa is a youthful country, as 67% of the population is under 35 years old (Synthesis Report on South African Population, South African Department of Social Development 2007). Walk the streets of any medium-sized South African town at mid-afternoon and you meet hordes of children in school uniforms swarming out of school gates, setting off on their diverse journeys home – from leafy and spacious suburbs to crowded and unpaved townships. Within the premises of the school, a degree of racially neutral equality applies that is epitomized by the obligatory school uniforms. Beyond the school gates, however, young people grow up amidst the same patterns of segregation and inequality that characterize South African society at large.

These young South Africans are part of the 'born free generation', a term referring to South Africans born right before South Africa's transition to democracy (Mattes 2011:4). They were the first generation to experience childhood in a free and democratic South Africa. Unlike their parents, they have spent the large part of their lives in a society with open, inclusive public spaces and potential for encounters with South Africans of all backgrounds. They grow up preparing themselves for a future in this culturally diverse, united country. Great hopes are placed on this particular generation to make the new, inclusive, united South Africa 'work'. In this sense, young South Africans carry the weight of expectation on their shoulders (Boyce, B. 1999:88). This is evident for instance in this statement by Nelson Mandela:



This generation of youth stands at the border-line between the past of oppression and repression, and the future of prosperity, peace and harmony [...]. No one receives the attention of our government more than the youth. You are the future. In your hands is the key to make South Africa a great country; to make our society a prosperous and caring nation. (Nelson Mandela, Speech on Youth Day 1995)

The rhetoric is clear. But are South African youth indeed living out that future of prosperity, peace and harmony? The answer is ambivalent. One side of the story – documented in longitudinal survey studies – seems to confirm the promise. The 2005 South African Social Attitudes Survey found that national pride was high among South African youth, who appeared to be optimistic about the future of their country and their own place in it (Boyce, G. 2010). Specifically when focusing on members of the born-free generation, the study documents signs of the development of a national identity independent of race. On the basis of one research survey, Mac Donald (2005) concludes that ‘a clear and powerful South African identity’ is in the process of being forged by youth, captured under the name ‘Msanzi Mense’ (literally: South African people). What brings these youngsters together across racial boundaries are shared interests in the sphere of popular culture. In their work on young South Africans in a Johannesburg shopping mall (‘The Zone’) Nuttall (2004) and Nkuna (2006:211) found evidence of the development of new hybrid youth cultures on the basis of shared lifestyles and consumption patterns. In the view of these scholars, the forging of these youth cultures constitutes one of the most ‘decisive cultural shifts in the post-apartheid era’ (Nuttall 2004:435). These young people are ‘actively trying to create a new multiracial identity’ (Nkuna 2006:262). These emerging youth cultures combine elements from Americanized global youth culture with South African inflections. English, as the unquestioned dominant language, is interspersed with words from both African languages and Afrikaans. These youth cultures are racially inclusive – as ‘taste’ becomes a marker of identity above race and culture. But they are exclusive in terms of class, being constituted for the most part by urban, upper middle class youngsters, most of whom have attended so called Model C schools (Nuttall 2004:436; for more on Model C schools; see Chapter Four).

However, the other side of the story of South African youth tells of the developments outside of these pockets of integration, cosmopolitanism and non-racialism. That part is about the same tensions underlying South African society as a whole: socio-economic inequality, ongoing racial segregation, HIV/AIDS and crime. These tensions do not fail to have an effect on the youth. By contrast, the youth is disproportionately affected by them. As already referred to above, South African youth grow up in extremely unequal worlds of experience and opportunity (Bray et al. 2010:21). An increasing number of black

children grow up within black elite and middle classes. But the lives of many other 'born free' children continue to be marked by the pervasive legacy of apartheid inequities. Terreblanche points out that younger people in the lower classes have indeed received much better schooling than their parents, but they have no reasonable prospects of finding formal jobs (Terreblanche 2002:35). At the end of the day, it is the immediate neighbourhood in which young people live that profoundly shapes both their lives and their future opportunities, and as we have seen neighbourhoods continue to be predominantly marked by boundaries of race and class (Bray et al. 2010:23, Christopher 2001). Soudien (2001:312) argues that school-going young people are exposed to a wide range of potentially contradictory experiences, formal and informal discourses and reference points for identities. Within these processes, the legacy of apartheid continues to have an impact as, according to Soudien, young people's 'identities are of their apartheid past but simultaneously against it' (Soudien 2001:314). Bray and co-authors conclude that for the majority of the post-apartheid generation 'the transition from apartheid has engendered a mix of opportunities and disappointments, changes for the better and changes for the worse' (Bray et al. 2010:22). This raises the need to critically inquire into the label 'born free'. How appropriate is it to describe a generation as 'born free' when both the legacy of the past and the weight of expectation so strongly weigh upon it? At the same time, the fact that this is a term that is part of the public discourse on the post-apartheid generation is meaningful in itself. Against this background I found it particularly interesting to examine how members of the post-apartheid generation give meaning to their South African national identity, how they navigate the contradictions that are part of South African society, and how they fare under the 'weight of expectation' described by Boyce (Boyce 1999:88). Is a transcendent collective identity indeed within closer reach for this generation, as the generation before them suggests (Eaton 2006)?

### **Social and theoretical relevance of studying national identity**

Before outlining the details of my study, let me say a few words about why I believe a research focus on national identity is relevant and valid, both on a social and a theoretical level. The concepts of nationalism, nationhood and national identity are often approached with suspicion both in academic and lay circles because of their association with separatism, exclusionism and extreme-right politics (Brubaker 2004:117). In the South African context this is even more the case because of the country's history of extremely exclusionary nationalism. Some scholars have argued against using the concept in the post-apartheid context at all (see e.g. Maré 2005).

At the same time, the specific context of post-apartheid South Africa allows for a different interpretation of the concept of nationalism than the exclusionary versions referred to above. It allows us to study the development of a 'revindicated nationhood' (Brown 2001:762), a nationhood that can work in a 'fundamentally inclusive way', that is able to 'transcend or at least relativize internal differences and distinctions' (Brubaker 2004:117). Defined in this way, nationalism and nationhood can be valuable as a means to enhance feelings of solidarity and belonging, commitment and collective responsibility among fellow members of a nation. It is this belief that when endowed with an inclusive meaning, nationhood has the potential to unite people across social dividing lines, which has motivated me to study it in the South African context. The importance of such an inclusionary process in South Africa has been formulated eloquently by Chidester and co-authors:

There can be few more important projects than the interweaving of South Africa's diverse, fragmented and unequal population into a unified, responsible, tolerant and proud people; for it is, arguably, along such a road that any chance of a peaceful, secure future lies (Chidester et al. 2003:295).

This point speaks primarily to the social relevance and importance of the issue at a domestic South African level. In addition, I believe the subject has both social and theoretical relevance on a level well beyond the local South African context. Contemporary public debates in nation-states across the globe are dominated by questions of national belonging and in- and exclusion. Ceuppens and Geschiere speak of an upsurge of 'autochthony' (2005:386): a discourse that centres on a sharp distinction between those who are 'indigenous' to the nation – the 'real', 'authentic' citizens – and those who do not belong, the strangers or 'allochthons'. In short, 'autochthony' is about 'an obsession with belonging and the exclusion of strangers' (2005:386). Referring to the work of Li, Ceuppens and Geschiere emphasize how processes of intensified globalization have been accompanied by a 'conjuncture of belonging' (2005:385). This is particularly the case for Western Europe, where the waves of immigration of the second half of the twentieth century have dramatically changed the composition of societies. As a response, the theme of national identity has resurfaced on the political agenda of many countries across Europe, and debates about the boundaries of inclusion have been reopened. Importantly, the trend is not restricted to Western Europe alone. Geschiere and Ceuppens convincingly demonstrate the similarities between debates over autochthony and belonging in Western Europe and different parts of Africa. This is particularly visible in the postcolonial context of West Africa. However, the rise in xenophobic violence in South Africa and the general climate of hostility towards '*Makwere-kwere*' (Africans from north of the Limpopo river) can be seen as another manifestation of the same trend

(2005:396). The driving force behind this trend of autochthony, the authors point out, lies in the multiple facets of the globalization process, a 'global conjuncture' that motivates a defence of local roots (2005:387). In depth studies of the ways in which these processes manifest themselves in different national contexts will enhance our general understanding of the phenomenon, and South Africa constitutes a very rich and insightful case.

What makes the South African case particularly interesting is that it manifests two different dimensions of the debate on belonging. One dimension is the trend towards the clear demarcation of foreign 'Others', specifically African migrants, a trend that reflects the universal patterns described above. Strong discourses on South African nationhood are likely to enhance the boundaries between autochthons and foreigners. The second dimension is the question of belonging of what could all be referred to as 'autochthonous' South Africans: the different population groups that make up the South African citizenry. On a formal level, their nationality is not questioned. But as we will see in this study, this does not prevent South Africans of different backgrounds from experiencing anxiety over their belonging to the national community. Feelings of exclusion, alienation and of being treated as a secondary citizens are common among ordinary South Africans of different backgrounds. At this level, a strong inclusive discourse of South African nationhood could be a positive force in enhancing the sense of belonging among members of a divided and fragmented population. It is this inclusive version of nationhood that is often lacking in contemporary debates about national identity across the globe, and it is on this point that the South African example can particularly be a source of new insights and inspiration. The South African case is thus a perfect example of the two very different faces of nationhood: the inclusive, 'benevolent' face and the exclusive, 'malign' face. By unravelling the national identity talk of ordinary people in this national context, we may arrive at a fuller understanding of this complex dialectic within processes of national identification.

### **Qualitative study of the national identity talk of young South Africans**

Two main questions were driving the empirical part of this study:

- 1) How do young South Africans give meaning to their national identities in relation to the contradictions and inequalities that mark their society?
- 2) In what ways are these processes responsive to important events which impact on the 'national mood', as described in the beginning of this introduction?

These interests require a different approach to that of the survey studies reported above. To be able to explore both subjective, individual meanings given to national identity as well as shifts in national identity construction over time, a qualitative study was the obvious choice. The empirical basis of the study is in-depth focus-group interviews with the same persons at two distinct moments in time, shortly after the two events described in the beginning of this chapter had occurred.

To date, there have been few qualitative studies that have examined the subjective meanings given to national identity by South Africans *across all racial groups*.<sup>3</sup> One lone example is the unpublished dissertation of Eaton (2006). A key finding in this study was that, for a majority of participants, *diversity* was the defining aspect of South African national identity, a positive feature, and a source of pride and strength (Eaton 2006:156 and 359). Eaton suggested that engagement with difference in itself might represent an area of overlapping experience to which all South Africans can relate (Eaton 2006:381). Respondents who considered diversity as an obstacle to nation-building and who rejected a multicultural vision of South African society were clearly in the minority (Eaton 2006:358 and 362). While this bodes well for the possibility of an inclusive sense of identity across different groups, it was also emphasized that this would entail a slow, evolutionary process (Eaton 2006:363). Indeed, many of Eaton's interviewees recounted persistent stereotyping, discrimination and racial prejudice. But many of them were hopeful about the next generation living out the ideal of unity in diversity in the future:

[...] It was suggested in several groups that the children of today can be brought up the kind of citizens who embrace diversity and make it work (Eaton 2006:235).

This finding triggered my interest in the born free generation even more.

The basis of this dissertation is a qualitative study into the national identity talk of adolescent South Africans across various racial backgrounds in the specific, situated context of the town of Pietermaritzburg, in the province KwaZulu-Natal. An important characteristic of the study is the way it was organized in time. Group interviews with the same groups of adolescents were held at two distinct moments in time. The first moment

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<sup>3</sup> Although I use the terms coined under apartheid to denote South African population groups, this does not imply my acceptance of their validity. Using racial categories in research may run the risk of reifying them as biological, natural categories. In accordance with many authors before me, I understand 'race' as socially and historically constructed. At the same time, I do not want to ignore the fact that – as Distiller and Steyn emphasize – 'the relationship between race and identity has ongoing implications for South Africans living, and living with, these constructed identities' (Distiller and Steyn 2004:5). Although these terms no longer have legislative force, they have and continue to influence South African society, and therefore it is relevant to take them into account in social analyses.

was October 2007, directly after the Rugby World Cup Triumph. The second moment was July 2008, only shortly after the wave of xenophobic attacks had engulfed the country.

The talk of these young people was collected by means of the ‘focus-group method’ (Hollander 2004:603). This way, it was possible to record and examine how young people are jointly giving meaning to South African national identity in their talk, and how the immediate features of that social interaction impact on that process. The extensive conversations that were recorded offered rich material in which the complex process of meaning-making could be explored in depth. The transcripts of the conversations were analyzed extensively using a discursive psychological-analytical approach.

### **Outline of the dissertation**

The central focus of the next chapter (Chapter Two) is the main theoretical debate on collective identity, in general, and national identity and nationhood, in particular. As argued above, I am convinced that a study of South African national identity construction can generate important contributions to our general understanding of nationhood and national identity. For that purpose it is necessary to set out the relevant theoretical approaches and indicate their strengths and weaknesses. In order to come to grips with the complex concept of national identity, I begin the chapter by addressing the question of collective identity on a more general level. Approaching the theme of collective identity from a strongly interdisciplinary perspective, I will discuss those contributions from anthropology, sociology and social psychology that have informed my own theoretical understanding of the concept. Drawing from these different approaches, I will build my argument for a qualified constructivist approach to collective identity, which emphasizes processes of shared meaning-making and the combination of both collective (ideological) repertoires and individual elements within those processes. I will introduce the discursive approach to the study of collective identity as a good way of examining how people construct the meanings of their collective identities in language by talking about those identities. The second part of Chapter Two is devoted entirely to the specific theoretical debates on nationhood and national identity. Within this domain, I will argue that a constructivist approach that conceives of nationhood as an ideology is most fruitful for understanding the dynamic processes involved in national identity construction. Following that same line on a micro-level of individual speakers, I will argue for the value of an approach that sees expressions of national identity as ‘actions upon the world’.

The excursion away from the concrete South African context into these more abstract and universal debates on collective and national identity is crucial for the development of the main argument of this dissertation. It is from these theoretical premises that my

epistemological understanding of national identity follows, and that particular understanding impacts on every subsequent step in the analysis.

Chapter Three provides a historical overview of the development of nationhood and national identity in South Africa. It primarily addresses the meanings that have been given to South African nationhood at the political level from the beginning of the apartheid era until the second Mbeki government (2003-2008), which have shaped the political context in which this study was conducted. Referring back to the theoretical discussion of Chapter Two, I identify the different ideological models of nationhood that have informed different ideologies of South African nationhood throughout the twentieth century. The extensive discussion of the development of national identity discourses at the political level serves an important purpose for the overall argument of this study. One of the key premises following from the theoretical discussion of Chapter Two is that when people talk about their national identity, they are drawing from collectively available stories or ‘repertoires’ on that nation – and the stories formulated by political leaders constitute a primary collective resource. This is particularly the case for those repertoires that have become commonsensical. The historical overview of political repertoires is thus important in order to be able to contextualize and interpret the collective themes that emerge in the talk of ordinary South Africans. To use the language of the methodological approach of this study, it is necessary to be able to identify the interpretative repertoires that provide the content material for South African national identity talk. The choice to describe the development of the political repertoires from the beginning of the apartheid era until the Mbeki governments was a conscious one. In order to interpret and understand the specific charge of the post-apartheid nation-building project, we need to take its predecessor into full consideration. The inclusive post-apartheid national narrative was articulated in direct reaction to the exclusive apartheid narratives, and should be understood in relation to one another. Apart from this historical development, Chapter Three describes the tensions and contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa, both on a concrete level of everyday realities and within its ideological make-up. It sets out how, during the Mbeki years, the until-then dominant project of South Africa as a Rainbow Nation was increasingly challenged by alternative ideologies, in particular that of Africanism. I end the chapter with a brief discussion of the political power struggle between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma that unfolded during the second half of my fieldwork period in South Africa. While Mbeki was still president at the time of the last series of interviews, the battle over his succession raged full force in those months of June and July 2008. In December 2008, it culminated in the election of Jacob Zuma as ANC party president at the Party Conference in Polokwane. Although Zuma’s presidency of the

ANC and later of the republic does not fall within the timeframe of my study, the hectic run-up to these events did have an impact on the socio-political context of the study.

Chapter Four addresses the specific question of methodology. It consists of two distinct parts. In the first part I will outline the methodological approach chosen in this study to operationalize the theoretical insights of Chapter Two. The central question here is how to analyze talk, and talk about identity specifically. The research questions and the theoretical premises of my study point in the direction of a discourse-analytical methodology, but this is a vast and complex terrain on its own. In the chapter I argue why, out of a variety of different methods for discourse analysis, I have decided on an approach that builds on insights from critical discursive psychology. Three central concepts in this approach – interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and the action-orientation of talk – are each briefly described. The second part of the chapter addresses the concrete set-up of the study on which this dissertation is based and the practical steps taken to collect the interview material. It firstly sets out the sampling procedure followed: how were participants recruited and what was the demographic composition of the focus groups? The focus-group interviews were all conducted within the setting of secondary schools, and participants in each group were familiar with each other as classmates. The school setting is thus the central institutional setting in which my study takes place, a feature that deserved some special attention. I briefly describe how schools have undergone the transition from apartheid to democracy and address the question of racial desegregation in post-apartheid schools. I then move on to describe the timing, procedures, content and the ways of transcribing the focus groups – which were all moderated by myself, a non-South African. This is followed by a section on ethical considerations in relation to the project. In the final section of Chapter Four, I outline how I have applied my methodological approach to the analysis of the interview material, and how I was guided more specifically by the three concepts of interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and the action-orientation of talk.

Chapters Five and Six form the empirical heart of this dissertation. In these two chapters, I will highlight the most relevant features of the 570 pages of interview transcripts that the focus groups generated. I will present the results of the data analysis, for which I followed the methodological approach described in Chapter Four. My study is a prime example of an inductive study, in which insights developed by constantly moving back-and-forth between empirical material, theoretical ideas and historical background information. The analysis consisted of a combined focus on broader content patterns of identity talk and on the specific conversational context of people's statements. What emerged was a clear



picture of the dominant themes that people used in their identity talk, as well as the ways in which they dealt with contradictions inherent in those themes. I especially examined the different ways in which speakers drew boundaries across the nation – inclusive or exclusive – and what ideological models of nationhood could be recognized in that talk. The results of this multifaceted analysis are presented in Chapter Five. The chapter has a fairly broad focus, mapping out the general patterns of people's national identity talk and elaborating on a range of related issues that people brought up during the conversations.

Chapter Six has a more clearly demarcated focus: it specifically compares the focus groups of 2007, after the Rugby Triumph, with those of 2008, after the xenophobic attacks. It examines in detail how respondents at each of these moments spoke about their national identity in relation to the two events, and how their constructions of South African nation were 'refracted' through these events. This way, the chapter provides an empirically based analysis of how identity talk is responsive to immediate, macro-social events. In this chapter I am most interested in the question of whether the event serves as a resource for constructing South African identity in particular ways and whether the event is open to a variety of different interpretations in relation to national identity talk. Through this analysis, we can get a good impression of the truly dynamic character of national identity construction in talk – a process that is, as I shall demonstrate, intrinsically 'eventful'.

The final chapter of this dissertation, Chapter Seven, brings together the key insights that emerged from the different steps taken in the analysis. I will address what the implications of my study are for our theoretical understanding of the discursive construction of national identity, which specific insights it provides about the nation-building project in South Africa, and what lessons can be learned for understanding processes of collective identification in other contexts.

# Chapter 2: Theorizing nationhood and national identity

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## Introduction

In this chapter I will address the theoretical premises that are at the basis of the argument developed in this dissertation. Before moving on to the specific theme of national identity, I will discuss the more general concept of collective identity and the different theoretical perspectives that have been applied to it in the social scientific literature. Early in the chapter I will position myself on the constructivist side of these debates – a position that has important consequences for the overall set-up of my study. A central question underlying the chapter is how we can conceptualize the *processes* through which people imagine themselves as members of a collectivity and, more specifically, a national community. In line with the constructivist approach, I will argue that language and discourse play a crucial role in these processes: people imagine their national community and their own national identities for an important part through the practice of talking about and giving meaning to that community.

The second part of the chapter is devoted entirely to theorizing the specific collective identity that is based on a notion of shared nationhood. I will first outline the different ideological models of nationhood that are at the basis of different variants of nationalism. This is important because, as we will see, these different ideological models inform commonsensical talk about nationhood and national identity. National identity talk commonly builds on three central themes – people, time and place – and these can be given different meanings through the different ideologies of nationalism. Importantly, while the meanings given to these themes might be shared across larger groups of people, expressions of national identity are at the same time always subjective, personal and specific to a particular moment in time. With regard to the latter, I will argue that events of the moment have an impact on the meanings given to identities. The theoretical premises of such an ‘eventful perspective’ will be developed in the second part of the chapter.

The theoretical literature on nationhood and nationalism is dominated by works that originate in Europe or the United States, and it commonly has the longer established nation-states in these parts of the world as its main point of reference. Reflection is needed when applying these theories to the specific context of postcolonial states in Africa or elsewhere. In this chapter, I will address this question and briefly look into the specific historical development of nation-building and boundary drawing in the African context. Contrary to the idea that the African context needs a different lens for analysis, I will argue that the constructivist approach outlined in this chapter offers a very suitable approach, *particularly* for the African context.

The overall purpose of this chapter is to offer a theoretically informed conceptualization of processes of national identity construction in talk, which can be operationalized in the empirical study of this dissertation.

## Conceptualizing collective identity

Identity has become a dominant theme in both sociological and social psychological research in recent decades, or, as Billig – referring to Shotter– suggests: ‘the watchword of the times’ (1995:60). From the 1960s onwards, the concept has diffused quickly as a category of analysis in the world of academia and as a category of practice in everyday life. As Brubaker and Cooper observe: ‘Qualitative as well as quantitative indicators signal the centrality – indeed the inescapability – of identity as a topos’ (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:4). The theme has spurred a wide range of disciplinary and theoretical approaches, ranging from a focus on personal or individual identities to large-scale collective identities. Despite this rise in scholarly attention, identity has remained notoriously difficult to conceptualize, and battles over its meanings overshadow much of the literature. What is meant by identity, then, is entirely dependent on ‘the context of its use and the theoretical tradition from which the use in question derives’ (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:6).

In this study, I am first and foremost interested in an individual’s sense of identification with a broader community, or what Poletta and Jasper (2001:285) have defined as ‘an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution’. This is the question of collective identity. As Brubaker and Cooper write: ‘Understood as a specifically collective phenomenon, “identity” denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or a category’ (2000:7). At its core, collective identity is about members of a group having something in common, of sharing a similarity. In the words of Taylor and Whittier,

collective identity is about 'the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, and solidarity' (1992:105). In a similar vein, Snow suggests that collective identities centre around:

An emphasis on a shared sense of 'one-ness' or 'we-ness', anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in their relation or contrast to one or more actual or imagined sets of 'others' (Snow 2001:3).

Collective identity is about a sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, a feeling of one-ness with fellow members of the group and a feeling of difference from non-members, who are defined as outsiders. As Poletta and Jasper's definition suggests, there is a range of thinkable sources for this sense of 'we-ness'. A group's internal similarity can be attributed to the fact that group members share views on a particular social issue or cause<sup>4</sup> – as in the collective identities that arise from social movements – but also to the fact that they share the same gender or nationality. My interest here is in the latter types of collective identity that fall under the heading of 'categorical identities' in the literature (Calhoun 1997:27). In the case of categorical identities, the sense of 'we-ness' of the group is not based on concrete social relations or networks between group members, but merely on the idea that all members of the group have something in common (Calhoun 1993:231). *What* they are believed to have in common has to do with the 'category' in question: for instance, to be perceived as belonging to the category 'women', 'African-American' or 'working class'.

### **From essentialist to postmodernist conceptualizations of collective identity**

It is precisely this question of how to characterize the attributes group members have in common that underpins the central epistemological debates about collective identity. Early literature was dominated by essentializing conceptualizations that considered these attributes to be natural, innate characteristics of people, singular and internally consistent givens that just needed to be discovered. This is commonly referred to as an essentialist or 'primordial' perspective.<sup>5</sup> According to Hall, early conceptualizations of group identity were about 'an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation' and a 'natural, inevitable, primordial totality' (Hall and Du Gay 1996:4). The emphasis was on sameness across time and across persons. These 'strong conceptions' of identity – as Brubaker and Cooper (2000:10) call them – still dominate

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<sup>4</sup> Note, however, that Klandermans and De Weerd (2000) do not consider individuals, who identify merely with a cause without identifying with the groups or organizations working for that cause, to be sharing a collective identity (2000:75).

<sup>5</sup> The term primordialism is not uncontested in the literature. For instance, in a good critical discussion on the term, Fenton convincingly argues that the term is frequently misinterpreted (2010).

commonsensical meanings given to collective identity. In academic work, however, the emphasis has shifted from viewing shared group attributes as natural and somehow ‘pre-social’ to viewing them as the outcome of processes of social interaction (Cerulo 1997:387).

### **The situationalist perspective: Barth**

Within the field of ethnicity – a theme on which categorical identities are frequently based and that offers important parallels to nationality – the work of anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) marked an important break with traditional approaches. Barth describes his own work as an early attempt at a constructionist<sup>6</sup> perspective on ethnicity (Barth 1994:12). His approach has also been labelled ‘situationalism’ (Brown 2000:13). The key insight of his approach is that the shared attributes of a group are not the static ‘outcomes’ of culture, but that they are socially constructed: they are defined by group members in processes of social interaction between the group and another group across a boundary. By consequence, this process is as much about the construction of cultural difference as it is about similarity. The shared attributes of a group are first and foremost the result of distinction between groups, or ‘the social organization of cultural difference’ (Barth 1969). Importantly, groups of individuals engage in this ‘organization of cultural difference’ for *interest-based* purposes: because it serves the pursuit of their common interests. Situationalism, Brown writes, ‘explains ethnic and national identities not as natural instinctual ties to organic communities, but rather as resources employed by groups of individuals in the pursuit of their common interests’ (Brown 2000:13). The defining cultural attributes are selected in response to specific circumstances, which makes ethnic groups situationally variable. As Jenkins sums up:

Ethnicity is perpetually defined and redefined by social actors in the course of interaction, and membership of ethnic groups, their boundaries and the cultural stuff upon which they draw, are all, to some considerable extent, variable (1997:142).

A key value of Barth’s approach that would come to underpin later constructivist and postmodernist approaches is thus the situational variability of group identities. Secondly, his emphasis on processes of boundary drawing between two groups highlighted the central relational dimension of ethnicity: ethnicity is constituted for a significant part through distinction from others. The circumstances of comparison vary and the question of who these others are and how they are defined is not static, which by definition precludes a fixed or essential character of groups. Finally, Barth’s work is important

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<sup>6</sup> In this dissertation, the terms (social) constructionism and (social) constructivism are regarded as referring to the same research paradigm, and are used interchangeably. Barth used the term constructionism in his 1994 work.

because it highlighted the *actors* involved in negotiating boundary markers. What matters is not what the analyst perceives as distinctive cultural differences, but which cultural differences are highlighted by the actors themselves.

### **Social psychological perspectives**

Another important theoretical strand in the study of collective identity has been developed within the field of social psychology: Social Identity Theory or SIT (i.a. Tajfel and Turner 1979, Tajfel 1982) and its more cognitive offspring Self Categorization Theory or SCT (Turner 1985).

Similar to Barth's perspective formulated above, both SIT and SCT place processes of social identification clearly in a social context of relationships between different groups. Here too, the perception of boundaries between what is called the 'ingroup' and the 'outgroup' is central to the definition of the identity of a group. A key process within the SIT/SCT perspective is categorization. Identification, according to SIT/SCT, is at root a form of categorization (Billig 1995:66). For groups to exist, individuals must categorize themselves in group terms. Consequently, social identity derives from our knowledge of our membership of social groups and the meanings that such memberships have for us (Reicher and Hopkins 2001:33). Central to the meanings of categories is the process of differentiation, as social identity always involves comparison. SIT and SCT are interested in the consequences of these self-categorizations for (normative) group behaviour and particularly intergroup behaviour. Another key premise of SIT/SCT is the multiplicity of social identities. People simultaneously define themselves in terms of memberships of different groups – but not all memberships carry the same significance at the same time. According to the theories, the significance of our different social identities depends on context, with particular contexts making certain identities more salient than others (Deaux 2001).

With their emphasis on the dynamic, contextual and multiple dimensions of social identities, SIT/SCT are influential theoretical models that have underpinned many of the works that are referred to elsewhere in this dissertation. The notion of identification as a process of categorization is a very valuable one, that fits well within a constructivist perspective on collective identity. However, the theories do have their shortcomings when it comes to addressing the key interest of this study: the *meanings* ordinary people attribute to the category of national identity within specific socio-historical and conversational contexts.

For despite their emphasis on the importance of the social context in processes of identification, both SIT and SCT have been criticized for their tendency to universalism. According to Billig, SIT and SCT search for psychological factors when it comes to studying identity, leading the analyst to the psyche of the categorizing individual: identity is understood as an inner response to a motivational need (Billig 1995:66). With this comes a focus on universal, psychological factors and cognitive processes, that ignores the ways in which meanings (and the resulting subject positions) are shaped in particular historical and social contexts (see Billig 1995:66).

Furthermore, when context *is* taken into account, it is treated as a 'given', and categories are treated 'as if they were largely read off from this context' (Reicher and Hopkins 2001: 39). What is lacking is the recognition that the meanings of categories are a permanent theme of debate and contestation within specific, local, cultural or ideological fields (Reicher and Hopkins 2001:34). Furthermore, the strong emphasis of SIT/SCT on *intergroup* relations results in a lack of attention to the complexities *within the group*. There is an implicit assumption of homogeneity within the ingroup that carries the risk of ignoring the contestation and debate that takes place within those ingroups about the meaning of the own category and its relation to other categories.

### **Constructivist and postmodernist approaches**

Although the ideas of Barth discussed above were of great influence on later constructivist work on group identities, his model was also criticized for neglecting the construction of the 'cultural stuff' within the group; the processes of giving symbolic and subjective meanings to identity categories within the group. This is about the 'inward' dimension of constructions of identity, of the group defining what the basis for its shared identity is. This inward dimension is as much part of processes of identity construction as the external, 'outward' dimension of defining the position of the group in relation to external others. Together, these dimensions form what Jenkins calls the 'internal-external dialectic of identification' (Jenkins 2008:47). Barth was criticized for implying that actors select cultural boundary markers in an arbitrary, rational manner in a given situation, thereby overlooking the importance of shared cultural standards and cultural institutions. McCrone formulates it this way: 'Barth reduces ethnicity to a largely tactical identity patrolled by cultural border guards, underplaying the self-conscious and symbolic expression which people themselves negotiate actively about' (McCrone 1998:29).

Subsequent approaches placed more emphasis on these processes of internal, shared meaning-making, and specifically on the role of representations, ideologies and symbolism within it. Cohen (1985, 1993) defined community as 'a decision people make

to depict themselves or others symbolically as the bearers of a certain cultural identity' (Cohen 1993:197). He emphasized that the content of an identity consists of a shared symbolic repertoire by means of which members construct a sense of similarity in an ongoing historical process. This is a move away from Barth's model that conceived of groups as resulting primarily out of practical or material interests to a view of communities as cultural or subjective. Communities in this approach rest on people thinking themselves to be part of a community and interacting with others to create the symbolic content of group identities. Through symbolism, a heterogeneous blend of people can be socially represented as sharing some fundamental attributes. This idea is also captured in Anderson's famous notion of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983, reprint 2006). In the second part of the chapter that addresses collective identities based on a shared 'nationness', this notion will be discussed in more detail. Building on this idea of 'imagining', Hall states that:

The prime ingredient which makes a national – or any other kind of community – viable is the idea we have of it, the meanings we associate with it, the sense of community with others which we carry inside us (Hall in Kennedy and Danks 2001:3).

'Representations' is the term used for the symbolic systems that produce meanings, which in turn offer the resources for this 'idea' of the community. Woodward (1997:14) states that 'representations produce meanings through which we can make sense of our experience and of who we are'.<sup>7</sup> Gamson (1992) very clearly sets out what he describes as the 'cultural dimension' of collective identity:

The locus of collective identity is cultural; it is manifested through the language and symbols by which it is publicly expressed. We know collective identity by the cultural icons and artefacts displayed by those who embrace it. To measure it one would ask people about the meaning of labels and other cultural symbols, not about their personal identity' (Gamson 1992:60).

In his later work, Barth acknowledges this central role of symbols of identity in the forging of the cultural stuff within the boundary, suggesting that it provides 'the material that ethnic processes can work with' (Barth 1994). The selection of cultural boundary markers,

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<sup>7</sup>The theory of social representations of Moscovici (1988) – a different perspective within social psychology – could also be relevant here. Moscovici's framework aims to explain how people come to share collective beliefs – social representations – about abstract ideas and social issues. An important element in Moscovici's work is the idea that people actively try to make sense of abstract or controversial ideas in the public domain. In this dissertation I have decided not to draw from this approach.



Barth concedes, is less 'haphazard' than might have been suggested by the earlier model. Large scale communities especially 'may have to appeal to specific, historically constructed metaphors and emblems, of fatherlands and flags, to symbolize the claim of shared heritage and identity' (Barth 1994:16). Because all individuals belonging to such a large-scale categorical collectivity cannot possibly know each other, the sense of groupness with these distant, anonymous others is for an important part dependent on 'collective forms of imagination'. Cohen (1985) argues that the power of symbols is that they are flexible and malleable. A symbol can be shared by the collectivity, even though its individual members will give a range of very different meanings to it. This also makes a collectivity based on symbols flexible, and allows for changes in membership over time. At the same time, strong symbols can be a potent force in the daily lives of community members and will give the community an appearance of agreement, of unity and continuity. Symbols are capable of creating a 'mask of similarity', an umbrella of similarity uniting an otherwise very heterogeneous group of people (Cohen referred to in Jenkins 2008:134).

Through the emphasis on symbolism, shared cultural standards and institutions, it is acknowledged that group identities are conditioned by cultural and historical processes that may have a degree of stability over time. As Jenkins sums up: 'History combines with the give and take of the moment in the social construction of ethnic boundaries and identities' (1997:142). While identities are thus socially constructed by group members, the circumstances in which this is done are not necessarily 'of their own choosing' (Jenkins 1997:142). Furthermore, group identities are never solely defined from 'within', by the group itself. They are always the result of a dynamic interplay between internal identification, whereby a group defines its own identity from within, versus external identification, where a collectivity is defined by others.

### **Variation, contestation and idiosyncratic remakes of identities**

Although shared meanings thus play a central role, it should be recognized that shared meanings of a collective identity that have been formed at the group level are not necessarily reproduced in the exact same ways at the individual level of the members of a particular group. Within social psychology, an important distinction has been made between the social construction of collective, shared beliefs and the individual appropriation of those beliefs. The first notion is about the process of the formation of collective beliefs at the group level, whereas the second is about the reproduction of those beliefs at the individual level (Klandermans and De Weerd 2000:75). As Klandermans and De Weerd emphasize, an individual's beliefs, sentiments, commitment

to the group, use of symbols and so on, will always be an *idiosyncratic remake* of a group's collective identity (2000:76; see also Jenkins 2008:102).

Furthermore, postmodernist scholars have emphasized that the process of the construction of shared meanings of the group or the collectivity is characterized by contestation and ambivalence (Cerulo 1997:391). In the postmodernist view, identities are marked by what Calhoun calls the 'incompleteness, fragmentation, contradictions of both collective and personal existence' (Calhoun 1994:14). Barth's perspective, with its focus on the processes at the boundary between two collectivities is said to make ethnic categories appear internally static within the group (McCrone 1998:29). In his 1994 work, Barth recognizes that 'nowadays we know that cultures are in flux, contradictory and incoherent, and differentially distributed on variously positioned persons' (Barth 1994:14). Calhoun similarly writes: 'Not only are there claims from competing possible collective allegiances, there are competing claims as to just what any particular ethnic or other identity means' (1997:36). One of the factors driving the internal fragmentation and contestation over the shared meanings of groups is the fact that individuals always experience multiple levels of identification, with different levels of intensity (Calhoun (1997:39). They identify in varying degrees with a wide range of groupings based for instance on occupation, gender, ethnicity, class or locality (Brown 2000:14). These different groupings all provide reference points for identification that co-exist, cross-cut or may conflict with each other. This process of interaction between different identifications has been addressed by scholars working on 'intersectionality'. Intersectionality refers to the condition in which a person simultaneously belongs to two or more social categories or social statuses, and the unique consequences that result from that combination (Deaux 2001:1). Key to the intersectionality approach is that various identities overlap and combine in complex ways and that these combinations may shift over time and place (ibid). People are thus positioned on a matrix of intersecting identities. From a constructivist perspective, these different reference points for identification could be perceived as multiple sets of symbolic or cultural resources. As Barth writes:

People participate in multiple, more or less discrepant, universes of discourse; they construct different partial and simultaneous worlds in which they move; their cultural construction of reality springs not from one source and is not of one piece (Barth quoted in Jenkins 1996:124).

The 'idiosyncratic remake' of meanings of a collective identity on an individual level will be impacted by the different 'domains of meaning' in which an individual participates. Indeed, as Barker suggests:

The resources that we are able to bring to an identity project depend on the situational power and specific cultural contexts from which we derive our competencies. That is, it matters whether we are black or white, male or female, African or American, rich or poor, because of the differential cultural resources which have constituted us (1999:15).

The example most common in the literature is the intersection between gender and ethnicity. Several works have explored for example the question of whether the meanings given to being female differ between black and white women (Deaux 2001:4). Power relations play a role in this process. The reference points for identification – and thus the identities – created in different ‘domains of meaning’ are not simply voluntarily acquired by individuals, but they can also function to impose identities, to ‘position’ people. Multiple domains of meaning serve to position different people in different ways. These various social positions have consequences for ‘the allocation of power and other resources’ (Anthias 2001:634). The most familiar example is about remuneration on the labour market, with women frequently being paid less for doing the same job as men, or jobs that women do being allocated a different economic value (Anthias 2001:842). The role of power relations is particularly relevant in the case of categorical identities that are first and foremost ascribed. The definition of the category, as well as the criteria for belonging, is commonly defined at a level beyond the reach of individual members. In fact, as Jenkins (2008:106) suggests, the very essence of a category is that it is defined by others: by the persons who are doing the categorization. In practice however, collective identities are not simply internally or externally defined, but are always the outcome of a dialectic interplay between processes of internal and external identification. Thus, even though the gender category of ‘women’ might have been socially defined by processes beyond the influence of individual women, as a members of the category women construct their own idiosyncratic remakes of this collective identity.

One way of doing justice to the postmodernist idea of identity construction being unaccomplished and in flux is to shift the focus from identities as entities to identification as a process, as suggested inter alia by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), and Klandermans and De Weerd (2000). ‘Identification’, Brubaker and Cooper argue, ‘as a processual, active term derived from a verb, lacks the reifying connotations of identity’ (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:14). Instead, it calls attention to complex and often ambivalent processes involved in processes of identification. The merit of the concept of identification, they suggest, is that it is ‘fundamentally situational and contextual’. A focus on identification allows us to examine the work that a given category is doing in a given context (Brubaker 2004). Writing specifically about nationalism, Brubaker suggests that we ‘start by considering the nation as a category, a term, and nationalism as a particular language, an

idiom, a way of using that word' (Brubaker 2004:116). The focus of the scholar thus shifts from examining the truthfulness of category constructions to questioning what could be the strategic interest driving a given construction of a category at a given moment. A focus on processes of identification opens the way for examining 'the active negotiation in which people take part as they construct who they are and who they want to be' (McCrone 1998:29), or 'the dynamics by which collectivities create distinctions, establish hierarchies, and renegotiate rules of inclusion' (Cerulo 1997:394). Despite the convincing call for examining processes of identification rather than identities as entities, the scholars referred to refrain from empirically investigating their suggestion. Before turning to the discussion of collective identities based on nationness, I will discuss an approach that might be particularly suited for doing just that.

## The discursive approach to identities

An important strand within postmodernist approaches to identity is the discursive approach that focuses on the role of language and discourse in the constitution of identities. Underlying this approach is a social constructivist perspective on language. While orthodox perspectives see language as a pathway to actual beliefs and attitudes within the individual, the discursive approach sees language as *constitutive* of social life. As Wetherell puts it:

'Reality' only emerges through human meaning-making. [...] As people speak, a formulation of the world comes into being. As accounts become available and widely shared, they become social realities to be reckoned with' (in Van den Berg et al. 2003:10).

Language as a signifying system is crucial for the construction of all social identities, because it creates the meanings, categories and labels which form the basis of subject positions. In the words of Barker: 'Without language as a social resource, we cannot think of ourselves in terms of particular social identities' (Barker 1999:15). Language plays a central role in the construction of collectivities. As Jenkins writes, the symbolic meanings of a (national) community are produced and reproduced for a large part through people talking about that community (Jenkins 2008:138). Categorical identities, in particular, depend for a large part on 'the production of ways of speaking about them' (Calhoun 1997:48). We could even go as far as to suggest that categories do not exist outside of the language used to describe them. Discourse and talk thus become central sites for the analysis of the construction of collective identities. As Ainsworth and Hardy state: 'discourse [...] is a shared social resource that constructs identity as individuals lay claim to various recognizable social or shared identities' (2004:237). The discursive approach is a vast and complex field in itself, comprising a broad spectrum of different perspectives.

While each of these perspectives shares the idea that individuals are socially constituted through discursive resources, there are some important differences that centre primarily on the definition of discourse and on questions of individual agency. On one side of the spectrum we find poststructuralist discursive approaches. In this view, discourses are conceived of as broader ideological processes that work to produce particular kinds of subjectivities within systems of power relations. Discussing the work of Foucault, Hall writes about discourses that ‘produce a place for the subject’ (1997:56). ‘Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us’ (Hall 1996:6). Identity is regarded as constituted through a person’s positions in different discourses, which are related to different – often obscured – structures of power (Wodak et al. 1999:8). What remains unclear is how this rather mystified process of discourse producing subjects works out in practice, and how it can be observed. In the words of Hall: ‘What is lacking is an account of the mechanisms through which subjects identify with positions, and how individuals ‘perform’ them in different ways’ (Hall quoted in Antaki and Widdicombe 1998:202).

### **Action-oriented discursive approaches**

Within certain strands of social psychology and micro sociology, a different, ‘action-oriented’ approach to discourse has developed that allows for a lot more agency for individual actors in the construction of categories. This is the central premise of discourse and conversation analysis that examines how individual actors construct and argue subject positions in discourse and language in order to promote particular visions of the world (Chryssochoou 2003:231). Underlying this perspective is a narrower meaning of discourse, concretely referring to talk, text or linguistic repertoires. In the critical discursive psychological approach of Wetherell and Potter, for example, discourse signifies ‘meanings, conversations, narratives, explanations, accounts and anecdotes’ (1992:2). Language is firmly conceptualized as a social practice, or social action (Edwards 1997:24). People use their language to *do* things: to create social worlds, identities, and available subject positions. In this reading, identity claims are communicative acts that are persuasive, rhetorical and performative, rather than descriptive. The action-oriented approach of critical discursive psychology offers a good way of operationalizing the analytical shift from identities to processes of identification. The approach allows us to examine the construction of identity categories for the work they are doing, treating them as ‘actions upon the world’ (Chryssochoou 2003:236). Brubaker suggests that the work identity categories can do is ‘to change the way people see themselves, to mobilize loyalties, kindle energies and articulate demands’ (Brubaker 2004:116). Identity claims, in this view, are projects: they are expressions of social relations that promote a particular

world view. They involve a certain vision of the social order, the groups within that social order and the relationship between people. They 'represent positions that one has or seeks to achieve, and simultaneously they describe the desired content of these positions' (Chryssochoou 2003:236). The notion of identity as expressing a social relation between groups is echoed elsewhere in the literature. Reicher's 1984 study of the St Paul's riot in Bristol in 1980 (described in Reicher and Hopkins 2001:47) showed that in defining their identity, participants described a set of social relations. To be from St Paul's was to be subordinated and oppressed. In this case, a certain type of social relations is implicated in the identity (between 'oppressor' and 'oppressed'). The particular meaning of this identity only makes sense when assessed within the broader socio-political context and in light of the social relations within that context. This leads Reicher and Hopkins to define social identity as 'an understanding of one's place within a system of categorical social relations along with the proper and possible actions that flow from such a position' (Reicher and Hopkins 2001:48). Identity claims, then, are an expression of social relations that involves imagining the world in a particular way. For instance, defining oneself in terms of race depends upon seeing oneself as part of a world organized by races with particular relationships within and between different races. This characteristic makes identity claims intrinsically ideological. My understanding of 'ideologies' is in line with Jenkins' point that they are 'bodies of knowledge [...] which make claims about the way the social world is and, crucially, about the way it ought to be' (Jenkins 1997:84). Jenkins' last phrase is of central importance, as it emphasizes the future orientation of ideological claims, which can be extended to identity claims if we regard these as intrinsically ideological. Indeed, as Hall writes:

Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not who we are or where we came from so much as 'what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves' (1996:4).

In their 2001 work on nationalism, Reicher and Hopkins quote Ricoeur's powerful statement that 'that which we call ourselves is also which we await and which we are not yet'. They further state: 'category definitions are not simply a perception of what is, but an attempt to produce what should be' (Reicher and Hopkins 2001:42). In their words, category definitions are 'related to a process of becoming rather than being' (ibid). Underlying this approach is a radically new perspective on human mental life, as the authors write: 'Human mental life does not derive from a passive contemplation of the world but from active engagement with the world – from the ways we are, we want to be and are capable of being' (2001:ix) Bernstein speaks of 'prospective identities':

‘Futuristic identities’ that ‘may draw upon sources from the past no less than the present but with a significant difference: the information collected [...] is used to fashion an identity grounded in a different – and ideally better – future’ (quoted in Smith and Tatalovich 2003:51).

This is echoed by Calhoun when he writes: ‘Our identities are always rooted in part in ideals and moral aspirations we cannot realize fully’ (Calhoun 1994:29). Through their identity claims people are thus not necessarily describing the present social reality as they see it, but rather promoting a version of social reality and social relations they wish to see in the future – or, in the spirit of Barth – that best serves their common interests. Furthermore – in line with postmodernist insights – versions of the future social reality are multiple and contested, as people with different projects will propose different versions of their own identity and that of others (Reicher 2004:935).

What is useful here is the notion of audience. As identity claims are made in public performances or conversations, there is often a direct audience present, and claims can be forwarded to achieve a certain result with that specific audience (such as persuading them of a certain view on the world). People try to position themselves in front of a particular audience and at the same time they will be – or at least believe they are – positioned by that audience. But there is another level of audience involved, as Gamson (1992:19) has described. He calls this ‘an unseen gallery’, a broader audience that is not directly present but that the speaker nevertheless reckons with in a context of public conversation. The unseen audience could very well be a powerful group in society. Apart from concerns about audience, the possibilities for promoting a particular version are limited by questions of ‘recognition and existing knowledge’ (Chryssochoou 2003:233).

### **Action embedded in broader socio-historical processes**

The latter point echoes the constructivist idea that identities cannot be constructed freely at will but have to work with (symbolic or other) material that might have a longer history. When people give meaning to a collective identity category in talk, they are not inventing the category from scratch. Instead, they are drawing on collectively available material, on ‘building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious elevations’ (Castells 2009:7). Meaning emerges from complex social and historical processes, resulting in cultural repertoires or systems of meaning that characterize various symbolic communities (Cerulo 1997:395). These repertoires are the types of resources Wetherell is referring to when she writes about the ‘social’ – the collective voices of culture – that are permeating the individual voices of people’ (Wetherell 2003:13) or ‘the cultural resources that people have

available for telling their patch about the world' (Wetherell 2003). These resources or repertoires are embedded in history, in a collectively negotiated space (2003:21). They are both independent of local talk and need to be continually instantiated through that talk (ibid). Lamont (1995:350) emphasizes that history, available cultural repertoires and structural factors constrain identity construction: 'More attention needs to be paid to cultural repertoires per se, including national boundary patterns, and to the ways in which they are constrained and shaped by structural arrangements and alternative cultural repertoires' (1995:352). Edley writes that 'when people talk, they do so in terms already provided to them by history' (2001:198). At the same time, each specific context produces a unique reproduction. When making an identity claim, a speaker 'weaves the available threads and voices differently on different occasions' (Wetherell 2003:13), producing different meanings of identity in different contexts. In other words, elements of shared meanings are (re)produced in a local, situational and idiosyncratic way.

## **Conclusion: collective resources and idiosyncratic remakes**

The conceptualization of collective identity employed in this study is informed by insights from several of the anti-essentialist approaches described above. Barth's social interactional perspective informs my understanding of collective identities as produced in processes of social interaction. In these processes, the construction of shared group attributes is for an important part informed by the distinction from other groups across the group boundary. But the dynamic process of drawing boundaries is complemented by an equally dynamic process of internal negotiations and contestations within the group about the meanings of the collectivity. A truly situational approach to processes of identification does not only recognize how identity markers shift over time in relation to different, varying external others. It also recognizes how, within the group, battles over meanings are fought out and individual members reproduce and appropriate the material through which categories are constructed in their own idiosyncratic ways. A shift away from identity as a condition towards identification as a process opens up the possibility to examine why categories are constructed in the way they are in a given situation. In this approach, Barth's insight that identities are situational responses driven for an important degree by tactical or strategic interests of individuals and groups remains valuable. At the same time, we must incorporate the idea that through symbolism, longer-term meanings are created that suggest a degree of fixation and rootedness. Bringing together the insights from different streams of scholarship, we can conclude that 1) identities are tactically constructed in response to varying circumstances, but that 2) there is an



intrinsic interest in infusing identity categories with essentialist content to create an appearance of rootedness and fixation in a reality of flux and variation. Brown makes this point very clearly: 'Ethnic and national identities which depict themselves in the primordialist language of historical continuity, might nevertheless involve fluid and rational responses to changing situations' (Brown 2000:19). Symbolic content derived from longer-term historical and cultural processes, presented in the language of historical continuity, provides the material that category constructions 'can work with'. A balanced and comprehensive analysis of the construction of categories of identification should be sensitive to this contradictory dynamic of variability and stability.

In my analysis, I will rely on methodology developed in the action-orientated approaches to discourse. The action-orientated approach makes it possible to 'specify the actors doing the identifying' and to examine the social or political projects that drive identity claims. The interpretation of identity claims as communicative acts acknowledges a degree of agency for the speaker making the claim. It allows us to examine the active ways in which ordinary people in everyday contexts negotiate meanings and identity positions for themselves. It is crucial to recognize that the construction of identities in talk is at once collective and situational or idiosyncratic. Individual members of a collectivity will be exposed to multiple different domains of meaning and everyday experiences, resulting in multiple reproductions of identities. At the same time, elements of the shared symbolic reserve of meaning are bound to feed into local, individual reproductions of collective identity.

In Chapter Four, I will further specify what my conceptualization of collective identity means for the concrete methodological approach in this study. The focus of the rest of the present chapter is on the specific dynamics involved in processes of *national* identification and the construction of collective identity based on shared nationality.

## **Collective identities based on nationhood**

A prominent categorical identity is that based on identification with 'the nation' and notions of groupness, similarity and connectedness amongst members of a nation. This identity has given rise to an extensive, separate body of theoretical work on nations and nationalism, in which scholars only rarely sought to place national identity within broader perspectives on collective identity. As McCrone (1998:40) argues, the tendency in the literature on national identity has been to focus on 'national' rather than 'identity'. At closer inspection, however, the national identity literature reflects very similar epistemological debates as those outlined in the field of ethnicity and other collective

identities. The primary question occupying scholars on nationalism and nationality has for long been the question of the character of the nation. The debate on this question is equally characterized by an opposition between those who conceptualize the nation as a community of people united by primordial, essential attributes versus those who see nations as the outcome of a process of social interaction and construction. This opposition manifests itself *inter alia* in the distinction between ethnic or ethnocultural versus civic perspectives on the nation (cf Reicher and Hopkins 2001:12). In the first perspective, the attributes that members of the nation share are perceived to be natural, rather than sociological: they exist 'a priori', prior to all experience and interaction (Ozкимli 2000:72). People possess these attributes through lines of descent: they are transmitted from one generation to the next without their essential characteristics being changed (Ozкимli 2000:75). This perspective is based on essentialist interpretations of race, ethnicity and nation. The ethnocultural nation is an organic, natural community that members are 'born into' and to which they feel 'an innate and emotionally powerful attachment' (Brown 2000:6). By contrast, in the civic perspective, the nation is first and foremost bounded by political markers. It is defined in terms of a shared commitment to, and pride in, the public institutions of state and civil society, which connect people to the territory that they occupy (Brown 2000:13). The nation is united by a common public culture, a way of life and a national character which is shared by all citizens irrespective of ethnic origin.

Underlying these different perspectives is a fundamentally different explanation of the origins of nations. Ethnocultural perspectives see nations and nationalisms as an age-old phenomenon. By contrast, civic perspectives fit in with broader theories on modernisation that suggest an intrinsic connection between modernisation and national integration (Brown 2000:17). Nations in this view cannot be seen as separate from the development of the modern nation-state in the era of industrialisation, capitalisation. They emerged or were 'invented' because 'they were useful units for the early stages of industrialisation and bureaucratic government' (Brown 2000:13), enabling political leaders to organize a political space in which both elites and masses could be brought together. This way of looking at the nation is reminiscent of the situationalism of Barth's model described above. The civic nation can be framed as an interest-based response to the changes in the economic environment that marked the modern era. Both Barth's approach to ethnicity and modernist approaches to national communities recognize that 'the sense of community based on ethnic or national identity can be a response to commonalities of interest' (Brown 2000:19).

### **Nations as imagined communities**

The work of Benedict Anderson (1983, 2006) on nations as ‘imagined communities’ also falls within this situationalist approach. As Brown (2000:17) writes: ‘Benedict Anderson located the core precondition for the emergence of nation-states in the development of “print capitalism” which facilitated the spread of a common vernacular language and literature so that the modern nation could develop as a new “imagined community”’. Anderson’s emphasis on the imagined character of the national community has had a particularly strong impact on subsequent scholarship. It has come to be seen as a key dimension of large categorical collective identities. The national community needs to be ‘imagined’ because the sheer scale of the nation makes it impossible for a sense of community to be based on immediate, interpersonal relations between members. Identifying with a national community implies that ‘ordinary people see themselves as the bearers of an identity centred elsewhere, to imagine themselves as an abstract community’ (Eley and Suny 1996:22). The members of the national community are imagined as sharing in a ‘deep horizontal comradeship’ (Anderson 2006:7) as ‘in the mind of each lives the image of their communion’ (Anderson 2006:6).

It is telling that Anderson’s work – similar to that of Barth – is criticized for overlooking the question of how the meanings given to the nation are shaped, negotiated and contested within national communities. Anderson’s notion of the nation as an imagined community does imply a key role for shared meanings on the nation, but Anderson has not addressed the concrete ways in which this collective imagining is carried out and sustained (McCrone 1998:6). A second point of critique on situationalist approaches in general is that they fail to explain the strong emotional appeal of affiliations based on nationality and nationhood: the ways in which national communities successfully mobilize strong feelings of loyalty, belonging, self-sacrifice and so on ‘to generate such widespread popular support’ (Ozkirimli 2000:170).

In reaction, subsequent work has placed more emphasis on the role of memories, values, symbols and myths in the construction of national categories (for instance Eriksen 1993). One response has been to revitalize interest in primordial approaches. For example, Smith (2008:10) argues that primordial approaches to nationalism have an important lesson to teach about the ‘intensity and passion that ethnicity and nation so often evoke and which modernists so often fail to address’. However, the danger of this approach is that we again fall prey to essentializing identities, a danger that is avoided by the constructivist approach.

### **The constructivist approach: nationhood as an ideology**

The situationalist emphasis on national identities as products of processes of social interaction *and* the central role and emotive power of collective meanings within these processes comes together in constructivist approaches to nationalism. These approaches equally view nationalism as a response to modernity, but for different reasons. Nationhood, in the constructivist view, is first and foremost an ideological myth, formulated to offer a sense of certainty and familiarity to individuals faced with 'the complexities and uncertainties of modernity' (Brown 2000:22). Consequentially, the primary function of the idea of nationhood is on an emotional level: to provide a source of 'moral and physical security' to people socially dislocated by modern forces (Brown 2000:42). Constructivist approaches recognize the importance of primordial meanings given to the national community, not for their truthfulness but for the rhetorical, ideological function that they fulfil. As Reicher and Hopkins write: 'National identity is always a project, the success of which depends upon it being seen as an essence' (Reicher and Hopkins 2001:222).

One of the trends of modernity is indeed that communities based on interpersonal relations are increasingly being replaced by abstract, large-scale communities based on categorical identities. The myth of nationhood plays directly into that vacuum, by mimicking the idea of a relational community on an abstract, large-scale level. The myth of nationhood constructs associations of the nation as a metaphorical 'family', of nationhood as 'kinship' and the national territory as 'home' (Eriksen 2002), thereby 'deploying the emotional power of the family in the service of the state' (Brown 2000:42). Importantly, this is as much the case for civic as for ethnocultural interpretations of the nation. In the constructivist perspective, then, the entire debate on the primordial or modern origins of nations in itself is not so relevant. What matters is not the characterization of the nation as an entity, but the ways in which both civic and primordial ideas are employed in the myth of nationhood in order to meet its ideological goals of constructing an idea of a historically continuous, naturally bounded community, in its natural place. Importantly, the nation is always constructed within an international context. Calhoun emphasizes that:

Claims to nationhood are also claims to distinctiveness vis-à-vis other nations, claims to at least some level of autonomy and self-sufficiency, and claims to certain rights within a world of nation-states' (1993:216).

As McCrone writes, myths of nationhood are reproduced through multiple forms of expression:

The narrative of the nation is told and retold through national histories, literatures, the media and popular culture, which together provide a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals (1998:52).

The myth of nationhood only needs to be believed in to become real and tangible for the members that make up the nation. It is this process of reification, not the truthfulness of nationhood, which should be the focus of study (cf. Ozkirimli 2000:222).

Studies have pointed out that in everyday practice, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between ethnocultural and civic interpretations of nations, as narratives of the nation will always contain elements of both (e.g. Wodak 2009:5, Brown 2000:37). As Brown suggests, 'the nationalist claim is contained in two different myths: those which offer a sense of categorised permanence in a territorial home, and those which focus on offering a sense of cultural sameness in the claim to common ancestry' (Brown 2000:19). The consequence is not only that multiple, conflicting versions of the nation co-exist but also that most myths on nationhood are internally ambivalent. This ambivalence manifests itself for instance in tensions between the idea of having an ethnic core and of accommodating ethnic diversity. This is also the dynamic that feeds into struggles over autochthony, a concept already referred to in the introductory chapter. The term is used in anthropology to refer to struggles over national belonging. Autochthony is about the idea that real, authentic members of the nation are those with a 'special link with the soil' (Geschiere 2009:2).<sup>8</sup> Struggles over autochthony result in hierarchies between those who are perceived as more or less authentic. As Geschiere points out, these types of struggles have been particularly fierce in postcolonial states. Referring to a similar process, Brubaker describes how the national category can be redefined in order to 'assert 'ownership' of the polity on behalf of a 'core ethnocultural nation', as is the identity project of Hindu nationalists in India (Brubaker 2004:117). Such struggles over autochthony are a clear manifestation of the tensions between ethnocultural and civic interpretations of nationhood.

As Brown (2000:48) notes, these tensions have globally become more prominent in recent decades, with the increase in ethnic diversity within states and the assertion of ethnocultural minority rights and minority nationalisms. The idea of multicultural nationhood can be seen as an attempt to resolve these tensions. Multicultural nationalism is based on a recognition and celebration of ethnic diversity within the nation and the ideal of equality between citizens as well as between ethnic groups.

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<sup>8</sup> The same ideas underpin ideologies of nativism; see for instance Ndlovu-Gathseni (2009).

However, according to Brown, multiculturalism is not immune to the tensions between civic and ethnocultural interpretations:

The term 'multiculturalism' is surrounded by an ambiguity which cannot easily distinguish between the (civic) call to celebrate ethnic diversity of the societies while being consciously 'color blind' in allocating power and status, or the ethnocultural call to restructure the institutions of the state to conduct politics specifically on ethnic lines (Brown 2000:48).

Inevitably, then, nationhood is likely to be a permanent site of contestation, in which different ideological perspectives, each with their own internal ambivalence, co-exist and compete for attention. These debates not only take place on a theoretical, scholarly level but they feed into debates about the nation in everyday practice. The three ideologies of nationalism – ethnocultural, civic and multicultural – provide the ideological material that can be employed in the construction of different versions of the category of the nation, to legitimize or mobilize for those versions.

### **Talk about people, time and place**

In the first part of this chapter we have seen that a discursive approach to collective identities suggests a central role for language in the constitution and reproduction of identity categories. In the current study, I will specifically focus on the role of language and discourse in the reproduction of national identity. If this identity is so strongly dependent on the production of ways of talking about the nation, what are the building blocks of such talk? What is the content of the collective cultural resources or repertoires about the nation that people can draw from when they are constructing their national identity in talk? From discursive studies to the construction of national identity, we can derive three thematic areas around which such repertoires cluster: people, time and place (Wodak et al. 2009:30).<sup>9</sup>

#### *People*

The primary topic of national narratives is that of *people*. This is made clear by Billig when he writes: 'Nationalism is, above all, an ideology of the first person plural' (Billig 1995:70). National narratives will address the question of who the people are that make up the national community and what it is they have in common. By consequence, national narratives will contain elements for the construction of similarity. In line with the central premises of Barth's social interactional model, the criteria chosen as boundary markers should be seen as the outcome of social and political processes. The different ideological

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<sup>9</sup> Note that Wodak et al. identify five thematic areas of discourse on nationhood: the construction of what they refer to as the '*homo Austriacus*' (the typical Austrian), a common past, a shared culture, a shared political present and future, and a 'national body' (2009:30).

interpretations of the nation that were discussed above – civic, ethnocultural and multicultural – each provide material to construct the national ‘we’ in different ways. More specifically, each of these results in a different meaning given to the ‘attributes’ that fellow nationals are believed to have in common, and thus a different basis for the similarity within the group.

Whether the boundaries around the national community are drawn along civic, ethnocultural or other dimensions depends on the ideological version of the nation that is being forwarded. In situations where a civic version of nationhood dominates, people are represented as part of the national community on the grounds of their formal citizenship and permanent residence in the territory of the nation. Instead, within an ethnocultural perspective, the national ‘we’ is defined by its shared ancestry or ‘blood’ (cf. Jacobsen’s ‘racial boundary’ (2004:189-195)). These different constructions will have important consequences for questions of in- and exclusion in and from the national community, such as the possibilities for non-nationals to become nationals. Although symbolically and discursively constructed, then, the different constructions of ‘the people’ can and will have very real material consequences for people’s positions and opportunities.

It is important to distinguish between ethnocultural and more loosely defined cultural constructions of the national ‘we’. In the case of the latter, the ‘common culture’ can be based on a wide range of features such as language or religion but also features of everyday culture like ‘sports’, ‘food and cooking’, ‘drinking’, ‘clothing’ and so on (De Cillia 1999:159). Jacobson wrote about a ‘cultural boundary’ as a third possible boundary alongside both civic and racial boundaries, defining ‘nationness’ in terms of values, attitudes and lifestyle (2004:188).

As we have seen, in practice, boundaries are likely to be based on a mixture of ethnocultural and civic dimensions and therefore inevitably ambiguous. Using different terminology, Reicher and Hopkins point to the contextual character of meanings given to the ‘national prototype’: a description of what type of person is prototypical of the nation (2001:39). However, whatever the criteria, all constructions of a ‘national people’ share a tendency to emphasize national uniqueness and intra-national uniformity, ignoring intra-national differences (Wodak et al. 2009:5). This relates to what Billig calls the ‘syntax of hegemony’:

In attempting to construct national, cultural unity, one part – one aspect of the cultural linguistic mosaic – will become the dominant, metonymic representation of the whole. Other ways of being national are repressed, forgotten (Billig 1995:87).

Just as important to national narratives as the construction of similarity is the construction of difference. Here again, the words of Billig are concise:

If nationalism is an ideology of the first person plural, which tells 'us' who 'we' are, it is also an ideology of the third person' (1995:78).

By drawing the boundaries around the national community, national narratives simultaneously offer the material for construction of non-national communities. As Triandafyllidou (1998) has pointed out, there is a range of significant other nations against which a nation asserts itself and with whom it compares itself. Stereotypes – shared cultural descriptions – of the national 'Us' and non-national 'Others' are likely to be part of this process. Importantly, constructions of difference are just as much a site of variation and contestation as constructions of similarity. Who the significant 'other' nations are may vary across people and across time. Furthermore, within the range of significant others and different non-nationals, not all are evaluated in the same way: they are not attributed an undifferentiated sense of Otherness. Instead, fine distinctions are often made between different groups of foreigners (e.g. Billig 1995:80).

### *Time*

The second common ingredient of national discourse is the notion of time, of *temporality*. Imagining the national community entails imagining how this community 'is passing through time', across generations, from the past, through the present and into the future (Wetherell and Potter 1992:141). The imagined national history will include myths of genesis and origin, mythical figures, triumphs, traditions, times of flourishing and prosperity, decline, defeat and crisis (Wodak et al. 2009:158). A central place in these ideas about the history of the nation is reserved for special, iconic moments of collective joy or suffering, and for national heroes featuring in those moments. Here again, the different ideological interpretations of the nation will lead to different constructions of the nation, a temporal perspective. The continuity of the nation across time and its historical origins play a particularly central role in the ethnocultural vision that imagines the nation as having its origins in time immemorial. This said, civic and multicultural narratives can equally contain references to a shared history, and to important moments and persons within that shared history.

Here, too, multiple interpretations and ambiguity are inevitable, and here, too, the tendency is to downplay differences for rhetorical and ideological purposes. A successful national discourse will highlight those memories that help to construct an image of unity, continuity and timelessness and will conveniently ignore those historical facts that tell a different story. This is because versions of national history serve the ideological purposes



of nationalism: they imply a continuity from the past through the present, but, most importantly, into the future. National discourses are not only backward-looking. Timelessness implies continuity throughout the past, present and future, and the national discourse will typically also contain ideas about a shared present and future. In the first part of this chapter, I argued that national identity claims were actions upon the world, future-oriented political projects that present a desired rather than a descriptive version of the nation. Consequently, particular representations of national histories can be forwarded or mobilised in the service of that future-oriented national project.

The construction of continuity across time is a complex matter for contemporary nations that are built on a clear break with the past: think of the postcolonial nations, post communist nations of Eastern Europe and of course South Africa after apartheid – all contexts which invited explicit nation-building policies after a history of conflict or division. Parekh suggests that: ‘In countries with a fragmented, discontinuous or disastrous past, the search for identity involves at least a temporary break with it and some measure of historical discontinuity’ (Parekh 1994:501). A strong future orientation might instead be a more fruitful option in this context. At the same time, Parekh illustrates how a strong break with the past might be contested by groups in society for whom the past is a central resource for identification.

While the literature is quite extensive on how national discourses include reference to national histories and futures, much less has been written on how national discourses incorporate events that are happening in the present. In what ways are national identity claims and narratives responsive to contingent events? How do events impact on the development of national identity across time? This question will be addressed in the last part of this chapter.

### *Place*

‘Representing the nation is as much a question of geography as it is of history’, Anderson (quoted in McCrone 1998:56) argued. Billig made the point even more specific: ‘It is not enough for the national community to feel its bonds of communal identification; it claims the need to be situated within, and have control over, a special section of the globe’ (Billig 1995:77). More than other categorical collective identities, national identity is bound up with ideas about place: about the territorial and geographical dimensions of the national community with which one identifies. In this chapter, I frequently spoke of figurative processes of boundary drawing, but, in the case of nations, boundaries are tangible and concrete, as the territory of the own nation is clearly demarcated from foreign territories. ‘Nations are perceived as limited by boundaries and thereby cut off from the surrounding

nations, because no nation identifies with humanity in its totality' (De Cillia et al. 1999:153). At the same time, the national 'place' is larger than can be experienced immediately by members of the nation, so it is by necessity an abstraction. The 'sense of territory' or the 'boundary consciousness of nationalism' is not about an individual's direct, personal link with the territory but about an imagined, 'mystical link' between a people and a place (Billig 1995:77). The national 'people' are imagined as belonging in a particular place, a national 'homeland', 'separated physically and metaphorically from other homelands' (Billig 1995:75). This imagining results in very concrete social practices such as the controlling of borders between nations and issues of the granting or denial of passage into the national territory. Furthermore, national discourse commonly contains affectionate descriptions of landscapes, natural resources, references to the natural beauty or harshness of the environment, but also – as De Cillia and co-authors point out – 'the materialized results of 'development planning', the artificial structuration and arrangement as well as the architectural artefacts of national importance' (1999:160).<sup>10</sup>

Importantly, the constitution of the homeland as a place is as much a result of (historical) processes of social interaction as any other aspect of the discourse on nationhood. In this sense, boundaries between all nations are arbitrary and could have been drawn differently in different circumstances. Later on in this chapter I will address the specific question of nation-building on the African continent. In the case of Africa the arbitrariness of national boundaries is particularly clear, leading Thornton to suggest that African boundaries are 'consequences of geographic happenstance and rarely reflect real ethnic, social or linguistic boundaries on the ground' (Thornton in Werbner and Ranger 1996:148).

Constructions of the national territory are far from static across context and time: they can be appropriated in particular ways to serve ideological projects. Indeed, the specific history of South Africa makes it abundantly clear how ideas of 'homeland' are modified across time and employed in strongly controversial and divisive manners. The term is of particularly sad irony in the South African context. Under the apartheid system, people were forcibly removed from their homes to inhabit designated 'homelands'. These were areas attributed by the state to the socially engineered ethnocultural 'nations' defined by that same state as part of the political project of separate development. In the new South

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<sup>10</sup> Recent literature has suggested that the concept of homeland is increasingly 'de-territorialized' in the contemporary era. This literature attempts to capture the new meaning of place in the era of globalization through concepts like Massey's 'global sense of place' (Massey 1991, Ghorashi 2004). When emphasizing the importance of place within national discourse, my intention is not to reify the national homeland as a fixed and bounded place, but instead emphasize the ways in which it continues to be *imagined* as fixed, clearly demarcated and stable.

Africa, Thornton writes, internal boundaries are again redrawn between provinces, boundaries that cross-cut the 'phantom boundaries' of recently 'absorbed', previously independent or self-governing 'homelands' (1996:148). He goes on to argue that 'there is almost no boundary in South Africa that is not haunted by the ghosts of borders past' (1996:149). In the next chapter, this specific South African context will be addressed in more detail.

### **Contestation over meanings of the nation**

As Billig's work on nationalism convincingly demonstrates, it is not so much the general idea of nationhood that is contested in the contemporary world:

The world of today is habitually represented as a world of countries and peoples, tightly bound in semantic unity and concrete reality' (1995:78).

What the contestation is about, Billig emphasizes, are the contrary themes or the ambivalence that is in the ideology of nationalism. The debate, he argues, 'is conducted within the parameters that take nationhood for granted as the natural context of the universe' (1995:87). Postmodernists have explored internal forms of contestation over meanings of the nation, and have specifically focused on the production of counter narratives that 'disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which imagined communities are given essentialist identities' (Bhabha 1990:300). The permanent availability of dominant as well as alternative narratives about the nation face an individual with the choice not only about his belonging to the community but also about 'which particular communal definition to endorse' (Calhoun 1993:223).

In the first section of the chapter, I referred to Brubaker's (1994) argument that we stop pondering the question of what a nation is and instead examine how the category of nation works as a political claim on 'people's loyalty, attention and solidarity' (Brubaker 1994:116). The approach to identities as claims, intended to represent particular versions of the social world, is in my view a particularly fruitful approach to the study of *national* identity. The choice of defining the national category in a particular way has everything to do with the strategic, future-oriented dimension of category constructions. To repeat Reicher and Hopkins' insightful phrase, 'those who wish to produce different futures will need to produce different definitions of contexts and categories' (Reicher and Hopkins 2001:42). This process is intrinsically political, for each particular definition of the nation will legitimate some claims and delegitimize others (Calhoun 1993:215).

National identity claims can perform very different functions in different contexts and successfully draw on different ideological repertoires in each of these contexts, as

Brubaker (2004) points out in two examples. The first example are claims to nationhood that challenge existing orders, put forward by communities that do not coincide with the territory of the state but nevertheless lay a claim to a separate nationhood. In this context, the ideological repertoire of ethnocultural nationalism might be the most effective. Examples are for instance Basque, Quebecois, Kurdish or Kosovo Albanian nationalism. Brubaker's second, very different example is when 'the category of the nation is used to create a sense of national unity for a given polity' (Brubaker 2004:117). The latter, he suggests, is the 'sort of work undertaken by leaders of postcolonial states, who had won independence, but whose populations were and remain deeply divided along regional, ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines' (Brubaker 2004:117). Most effective in this context is an ideological repertoire that constructs an inclusive sense of national identity, transcending or 'at least relativizing' the existing dividing lines. Both multicultural and civic repertoires can do that, but each of these will work to produce fundamentally different outcomes. Underlying Brubaker's two examples is also the question of 'what was first': state or nation. Where the first example is of a national community mobilizing to become an established nation-state, the second is a classic example of 'nation-building' within the already existing boundaries of a state. What it demonstrates is how the ambiguous ideology of nationhood can thus be moulded to perform a range of different functions in different contexts, and this is precisely its strength as a means for mobilising and manipulating political action (Brown 2000:4).

These are exactly the types of processes that social psychologists Reicher and Hopkins have examined closely in their book *Self and Nation* (2001). In their study, the focus is on the ways in which the specific definitions given to national categories relate to the mobilization of constituencies, of collective action and collective support. Reicher and Hopkins empirically demonstrate how different constructions of the national category lead to entirely different directions. Each of these constructions is a different 'action upon the world', promoting different versions of the social relations in which group members should live, and how they should relate to non-group members (2001:130). Importantly, Reicher and Hopkins recognize structural factors limiting the possibilities for the construction of national identities. The structures and social institutions in which people are located, they write, have an impact on the possible identity projects. In the first section of this chapter, I wrote that discourses relate to structures of power that position people in different ways. I also suggested that, when speakers construct an identity claim, they are drawing on shared resources that are embedded in and derived from broader historical and cultural processes. These conditions impact on or restrict the agency of individuals to construct identity categories.

What Reicher and Hopkins' study convincingly makes clear is that we not only need to be attentive to the rhetorical dimensions of constructions of national identity but also to how these interact with immediate, local contexts. A proper understanding of the work of identity claims is dependent on the close analysis of the local, situated context of the moment in which the claim is uttered. In the next sections, I will further develop this idea of an analysis of the 'situated' context by looking at the personal, idiosyncratic and the temporal dimensions of constructions of national identity.

### **Personal and banal nationalism**

Ozkanli suggests that an important issue that mainstream scholarship on nationalism has ignored is the familiar terrain of 'everyday life', the micro-level of everyday manifestations of nationalism' (2000:231). With their focus on how nationhood emerged as a – rational or ideological – response to sweeping changes in society such as industrialisation, modernity and globalisation, both situationalist and constructivist approaches have neglected how nationhood is reproduced on a daily basis, by ordinary people. Admittedly, Anderson did introduce the ground-breaking idea of the nation as an 'imagined community', but he did not address the *processes* through which people imagine and continue to imagine themselves as a national community. As Reicher and Hopkins note: 'The nation is understood as imagination, but little attention is paid to what is involved in imagining ourselves as a national community' (Reicher and Hopkins 2001:26). What has particularly been under-analyzed is the question of how *ordinary* people reproduce notions of nationhood. This is an important omission, because the imagining of the national community is as much dependent on its reproduction on the official, public level as it is on the informal, everyday level. As Condor writes: 'There is currently very little information concerning the ways in which ordinary speakers may mobilize national categories and identities in talk' (2000:179).<sup>11</sup>

Billig's 1995 work on 'banal nationalism' is one of the few studies that begins to address this process of the everyday reproduction of the nation. What makes nationalism 'banal', according to Billig, is not just that it is a dominant ideology but that it has become 'a form of life' which is daily lived in a world of nations (1995:127). In most established nation-states of the West, nationalism has become so commonsensical and taken for granted that it is automatically and unthinkingly reproduced. At the same time, nationhood has become 'unforgettable' in the process (1995:93). The everyday reproduction of nationhood derives for an important part from people talking about the nation. A

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<sup>11</sup> Since Condor made this observation, the number of studies on the ways in which ordinary social actors mobilize national categories in talk has gradually increased, particularly in the UK context. Examples are the works of Housley and Hester (2002), Mann and Fenton (2008), and Kiely et al (2001, 2005).

prerequisite is that people have a language at their disposal to talk about nations. The language that people draw from in their talk about the nation builds on several different resources, commonly centring around the thematic areas of people, time and place. Each of these will be discussed in detail at the end of this chapter. However, Billig emphasizes that it is not necessarily the grand themes, the 'grand memorable phrases', but the 'small words' that are so important for the commonsensical reproduction of nationalism. Words like 'we', 'this' or 'here', he argues, play a key role in making our national identity unforgettable (Billig 1995:106), for example in talking about the national soccer team as 'our boys', or 'us'. Politicians, journalists and ordinary people all contribute to this daily reproduction of the nation.

Condor (2000:179) argues for a thorough empirical approach to the reproduction of nationhood, by looking at the concrete ways in which participants in conversational encounters 'orient themselves to national referents'. In her view, research methods derived from discourse and conversation analysis are well suited to map out these processes. The limitation of Billig's framework of banal nationalism, she suggests, is that it presents national frames of reference as an uncontested commonplace for contemporary social actors, neglecting the potentially ambiguous character of banal referents and symbols (2000:1999).

Another arena where the everyday experience and reproduction of nationalism has been addressed is within anthropology. Eriksen (1993:115) alerts us to the important distinction between 'formal nationalisms' – the public ideologies of identification formulated at the macro-political level of the nation-state – and 'informal nationalisms', that are rooted in everyday life. Cohen (1996) uses the term 'personal nationalism', referring simply to the idea that 'individuals construct the nation for themselves' (Cohen 1996:805). Both formal and informal nationalism co-exist within the context of the nation-state and may complement or oppose each other. In fact, as Cohen suggests: 'To be successful, the politician must formulate nationalism in terms that enable individuals to re-appropriate it for their own requirements and propensities' (1996:805). According to Herzfeld, approaches to nationalism as an invention from above 'fail to recognize the role of the ordinary person in taking the grand images presented by the leadership and recasting them in the more familiar terms of local experience [...] ' (1992:49). Political appeals to nationalism can only succeed if they touch the right chord with their audience, and individuals within that audience can interpret them as being appropriate to themselves. The real challenge is thus to develop a discourse with which a vast diversity of people, each differently located in society, can feel comfortable. Symbolism can be of

help in this process, because symbols always allow for personal and individual interpretations.

This echoes the idea discussed above of the idiosyncratic remake of identities on an individual level (Klandermans and De Weerd 2000:76), as well as that of identity claims as personal, political projects. Individuals creatively and strategically re-appropriate collective and formal constructions of nationalism in ways that work for them.

These are very valuable additions to the more macro-political debates on nationalism that were sketched above. The conclusion from bringing the different insights together is that no clear boundary can be drawn between formal and informal, or political and everyday nationalisms. Instead, the two spheres heavily depend on and feed into each other. For nationalism to become a form of life, unthinkingly continued on a daily basis, it needs to be appropriated and reproduced by ordinary people in both talk and other practices. At the same time, these reproductive practices are in themselves ideological: they draw from and reproduce official versions of nationalism or counter versions formulated at political levels. The identity claims of ordinary persons, then, are as much political and social projects aimed at promoting certain versions of the social world as the identity claims articulated on more formal levels. The author of the claim does not fundamentally alter this intrinsic, ideological quality of identity claims. As Jenkins rightly states: 'Everyday life is also fundamentally ideological' (1997:160).

## **An eventful perspective on nationhood**

While mainstream scholarship on nationhood and nationality has tended to overlook the individual, micro-level variability of reproductions of nationality, even less attention has been paid to variability in constructions of nationality at different moments in time. This is despite the fact that postmodern scholarship has consistently emphasized how our identities are dynamic, fluid and always in the process of being produced and reproduced. Hunt and Benford argued that identities are reflections of worldviews and interpretations of extant conditions, and called for research into how personal and collective identity talk varies from one period to the next (1994:512). To date, there have been very few qualitative studies that do exactly that.

Meanings of identity categories do not only vary from individual to individual, but they also vary across time within the same individual. What is lacking in the literature is an adequate framework that can serve to analyze the ways in which temporal shifts in identity constructions relate to significant, short-term social or political events. What I am thinking of here has been most precisely formulated by Brubaker (1996:18).

Motivated by the need to understand the sudden fluctuations in nationhood that could be observed in Eastern Europe after the fall of the communist regimes, Brubaker argues for what he calls an 'eventful perspective' on 'nationness' (the idea of groupness based on identification with the nation). As we have seen, mainstream, modernist scholarship has located the emergence of nationality in broad, long-term, macro-social, economic processes. What is forgotten in the analysis, Brubaker argues, is how: 'Certain dramatic events, in particular, can serve to galvanize and crystallize a potential group, or to ratchet up pre-existing levels of groupness' (2004:171). What Brubaker is after, it seems, is to investigate nationness' responsiveness to immediate events. We need to understand why it is that people can be 'overcome by nationhood' by sudden events, and what he calls the process of the relatively sudden and pervasive 'nationalization' of public and private life'.<sup>12</sup> Contingent events, he argues, can have 'transformative consequences'. An 'eventful perspective' on nationness will look at nationhood not as something that gradually develops but as something that suddenly 'happens', or 'crystallizes' in reaction to short-term dramatic events (2004:171). In Brubaker's words, it will conceive of nationality as a 'contingent, conjuncturally fluctuating and precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action, rather than as a stable product of deep developmental trends' (1996:18).

The transformative potential of certain events is also captured by Piven and Cloward who wrote that 'extraordinary events break down belief systems which justify existing conditions' (quoted in Staggenborg 1993:322). In her 1993 article, Staggenborg catalogs different types of critical events, ranging from large-scale socio-economic and political events to accidents and natural disasters. She also points to the important distinction between events that are 'manipulated', socially orchestrated, and events that cannot be controlled or even anticipated (1993:322).

Of course, the suggestion of a relationship between events and national identity is in itself nothing new. Authors on nationality and nationhood emphasize the importance of such manipulated, orchestrated events and ritual performances in producing and maintaining national identities. Spillman (1997:17) speaks in this context of 'producing national identities in celebration'. Van Hilvoorde and co-authors write: 'In order to experience nationality, one needs exceptional events, celebrations, rituals and ceremonies' (2010:90). Quoting Zerubavel, Cerulo writes the following about occasions such as national holidays:

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<sup>12</sup> With the phrase 'nationalization of public and private life', Brubaker is referring to the situation in which certain events have the effect of transforming dominant narratives and interpretative frames into much more 'national' ones.



The interjection of such national occasions into the routine calendar of events is meant to disrupt citizens' individualistic activities and refocus the population on collective national issues (Zerubavel 1985:46). Through these ritualistic exposures, citizens are directed to their shared national membership and national identity is continually reenforced' (1995:16).

One of the most successful sites for ritualistic exposure to and reinforcement of national identity is the arena of international sports. This particular 'niche' is well covered by social scientists.

However, events that are not deliberately staged could just as well strongly invoke national identity. A key example of a contemporary event that has been examined frequently for its impact on expressions of national identity were the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001. As Li and Brewer write: 'The 9/11 attacks resulted in immediate, visibly evident increases in expressions of national identification and unity throughout the United States' (2004:2).

The approach in all these works, however, is somewhat different from what Brubaker seems to have in mind. An eventful perspective on nationhood is not simply about measuring expressions of national sentiment 'before' and 'after' an important event. It is about developing an approach that is truly sensitive to the fluidity of national identification, to capture the variability of nationness across time, the process of the ebb and flow of nationhood. In this view, nationness is regarded as intrinsically 'eventful'.

### **Reicher and Hopkins: strategic adjustments of identities across time**

The social psychological study of Reicher and Hopkins (2001) does examine the important question of fluctuations in national identity construction across time. A core premise in Reicher and Hopkins' analysis, as we have seen, is the idea that constructions of identity categories are related to the process of becoming, to political projects that speakers are mobilising for. This, the authors argue, requires a model of analysis that can explain how category constructions develop over time. The model they propose is able to account for two patterns of variability: variability in identity category constructions across different 'parties' – or synchronic variability – and variability across different moments in time – diachronic variability (Reicher and Hopkins (2001:202). The type of variability across time the authors analyze is, for example, how parliamentarians shift in their construction of the identities of competing political parties before and after an election. What is happening here is that identity categories are strategically adjusted to perform different functions at different moments in time 'in order to maintain a consonance with the project of mobilization' (2001:192).

Although both Brubaker (1996:18), and Reicher and Hopkins (2001) address the often neglected question of temporal fluctuation in the construction of identity categories or 'groupness', their points of departure are different. Brubaker's idea of suddenly being 'overcome by nationness' seems to indicate a one-directional process of an active, occurring event and a rather passive individual that is suddenly infused with nationalist sentiment. By contrast, in Reicher and Hopkins' perspective, the centre of gravity with regard to agency is certainly with the speaker. Events do cause shifts in the context but the emphasis of the action is with the speaker, who actively reformulates the category in order to safeguard his political project.

At the end of their book Reicher and Hopkins do refer to another form of temporal variability that resembles Brubaker's reading more closely. They suggest that in focusing their attention to 'identity, to meaning and to action' they might have omitted 'the element of passion' (2001:217). They further propose that it is precisely in the relationship between identities and events that questions of emotion, of passion are located. Importantly, however, is the authors' point that emotions invoked by events 'depend upon the way in which phenomena are understood' (2001:217). This is a crucial point, because it allows us to place the role of emotions in relation to national identity within a constructivist – or, in the specific model of Reicher and Hopkins, rhetorical – framework. It allows us to combine a focus on strategic, future-oriented construction of identities with the analysis of the passion involved in issues of national identity. This point touches on the debate described above between different theoretical perspectives on nationalism. While ethno-symbolists criticized modernist for being unable to analyze the strong emotive power of nationalism, constructivists replied that what matters is that people believe in essentialist images of their nation.

Drawing of the example of the Falklands war, Reicher and Hopkins demonstrate how the (strategic) construction of an event could result in it being a catalyst of intense national passion and emotion. It was only when the event of the landing of the Argentinian troops on the islands in 1982 was, in the words of Brubaker, 'nationalised' – cast in an interpretative framework of the British nation being affronted – that this public response was triggered. As the authors write: 'Passion flowed once identity was engaged in the events' (2001:218). Events can be interpreted to invoke national identity, and they can invoke that national identity in different ways. If an event is interpreted as an affirmation of identity, it is likely to invoke national pride and pleasure, but the interpretation of a denial of or attack on national identity can invoke opposite emotions such as anxiety,

sadness or anger (2001:221). While the first could be seen as 'identity-affirming events', the latter example are 'identity-discrediting events'.

Furthermore, their examples suggest that the ways in which the category is constructed shift in light of such a transformative event. Specifically, these types of events lead to re-interpretations of the social relations within the national community as well as between the national community and outsiders. This, they show, takes place in very contrasting ways: from strengthening horizontal inclusion to redrawing the boundaries so as to place certain nationals outside of the national community. Importantly, the authors emphasize, such transformations in social relations are derived only once national identity is invoked, once the event has been 'nationalized', as Brubaker would say.

### **Multiple ways of interpreting events**

In Reicher and Hopkins' short discussion of the issue, they bring across one very important message that was also made by Staggenborg (1993): events – like other social constructions – are for an important part constituted by the ways in which they are described. Staggenborg emphasizes that events do not in and of themselves produce change, because the interpretation by individuals and organizations 'intervenes between the events and their outcomes' (1993:320). In a similar vein, Patton (1997:29) suggests that 'descriptions define a given event within a social field of action and interpretation and are therefore constitutive of social events'. Competing explanations may be offered by different speakers because they may seek to use an event to define or redefine a social problem in a particular way (Paterson 2006). In short, the interpretation of events is a matter of contestation in which language and general forms of representation play a central role. Patton (1997:30) urges us to reject 'the common sense view that events stand outside or apart from the means of representation'.

Turning again to the 9/11 attacks, studies with a discursive approach have indeed demonstrated that interpretations of the event varied significantly across local contexts and a patriotic response was far from unilateral. In the view of Mattingly, Lawlor and Jacobs-Huey (2002), the 9/11 attacks 'compelled the negotiation of identity as an American'. In their analysis of interviews with African-American women, they shed light on the ways in which specific identity repertoires (race, class, motherhood) intersect with interpretations of the 9/11 attacks. They conclude that 'the discussions and stories of these women convey a strong resistance to alignment with a pro-American or patriotic stance' (2002:751). Salaita (2005) demonstrates how the 9/11 attacks altered the relationship between different groups within the United States. Before 9/11, he writes: Arab-Americans were 'the invisible racial ethnic group' of the United States; after 9/11

they ‘evolved from invisible to glaringly conspicuous’ (2005:149). While Salaita focuses on the ways in which the identity of a particular group was externally defined after the attacks, Ghorashi (2004:337) registers how a group’s own internal self-definition shifts in response to the event. She observes a shift in the identity politics of the Iranian diaspora after 9/11. Before the event, Iranians emphasized their cultural distinctness alongside their sameness with Americans, while afterwards the focus was clearly on sameness with Americans. In these types of studies, we not only see how the construction of a category varies across different groups within society but also how the same groups may shift in their construction of an identity category in response to changes in time, more specifically those caused by critical events.

An eventful perspective on national identity and nationality allows us to examine not only the variability and contestation in the construction of categories across different individuals and groups but to include that analysis of variability across time. Zooming in on the ways in which the category of nation is constructed in the light of different events and different moments in time by different people will be a first step towards establishing a truly dynamic picture of the processes of identity construction. It will allow us to examine the dynamic interplay between short-term shifts in the socio-political context and shifts in the construction of identities, claims, and projects.

## **Imagining the nation in the African context**

In the current research project the focus is on the construction of nationalism and national identity in South Africa, an African nation that has only recently become a democratic nation-state, after a long period of imperialism and white minority rule. In the current section I will address the important question of the applicability of dominant theories on nationalism on the specific historical, socio-political context of processes of nation-building on the African continent.

An important point of critique on dominant theories on nationalism is that they have been formulated within a ‘Western’, predominantly European, frame of reference. For example, the Indian scholar Norbu explicitly describes the dominant literature on nationalism as ‘Eurocentric’, because ‘the study of nationalism was pioneered and still remains largely a domain of the western scholars who have almost exclusively focused upon western or more precisely European historical experience of nationalism’ (1992:6). He argues that this makes these theories ill-suited for the analysis of nationalisms in other parts of the world, or specifically what he describes as ‘Third World Nationalism’ (1992:6). But the critique does not only come from the outside, as European scholar on nationalism

Smith writes: 'We are still not free of the Eurocentrism common to most studies of nationalism' (Smith 2008:183:xi-xiv).

There is certainly ground for this type of critique. It is true that the main authors on nationalism discussed in this chapter have formulated their theories in reference to the historical background and development of European states, and very few of the dominant authors have explicitly contextualized their theories in other parts of the world. Even within more critical, innovative and discursive approaches discussed here – like Billig's work on banal nationalism (1995) or the works of Reicher and Hopkins (2001), Condor (2000), Condor and Abell (2006) and Wodak and co-authors (2009) – the empirical work has always been located in European nation-states. Having said this, we should not denounce the value of the theoretical insights discussed here for understanding non-European nationalisms on the grounds that they have been formulated in a European context. On the contrary, I believe that the constructivist perspective argued for in this chapter – that conceptualizes nationhood as a discourse, an ideology, an action upon the world – is particularly useful for analyzing constructions of nationhood and nationalisms in an African context.

Implicit in the argument that dominant theories on nationalism would not be applicable to non-European contexts is an assumption that I believe is misleading: the assumption that there are two types of nations in the world, juxtaposed as opposites, which are each calling for their own theoretical explanations. Evidence for this assumption is supposedly found in the different trajectories to nationhood that African nation-states have followed as compared to European nations. European nations, in this view, are regarded as 'arrived' nations (Simpson 1994:464), with an uncontested internal legitimacy and a population that was already a nation before the formation of the nation-state. In that sense, European nation-states are seen as being built on a 'natural fit' or correspondence between nation and state territory: the ultimate aim of nationalism. By contrast, in the case of postcolonial African states the political unit of the state with its bounded territory was already in place without a sense of cohesive nationhood of the population inhabiting that state. As Simpson explains:

In the case of the former the nation was held to have preceded the state, or both had emerged simultaneously in a dialectical fashion, whereas in the case of Asia and Africa they were in the unfortunate position of having been granted statehood at the time of independence without yet constituting nations (1994:464).

This is unfortunate, the argument goes, because most postcolonial states inherited a population so diverse that the development of a cohesive sense of nationhood would be

utterly complex if not outright impossible. Along these lines, Thornton argues that in the African context it makes more sense to speak of countries than of nations or nation-states:

By countries I mean named areas of land demarcated by international boundaries, but not necessarily possessing comprehensive state apparatuses, full administrative or fiscal coverage of the area so named, or even a coherent self-identity as such. Seen as such, most of Africa exists of countries, not nations or nation-states (1996:148).

My problem with this line of thought is the suggestion that European nations are accomplished, arrived, naturally grown harmonious units while the opposite is attributed to African nations. This implies attaching an essentialist meaning to European nations, while acknowledging the constructed nature of African nations. The historical development of nation-states on either continent is more intertwined and features more similarities than this binary juxtaposition of European and African nations suggests.

### **Boundaries in the African context**

It is undeniably true and widely acknowledged that the boundaries of African states have been drawn in a manner that was 'haphazard and arbitrary' (Herbst 1989:675). The system of boundaries that is still by and large operational in contemporary Africa is the same system that was drawn up in the late nineteenth century by the colonial powers. It is also true that in this process of colonial boundary drawing very little account was given to 'ethnocultural, geographical and ecological realities of Africa' (Herbst 1989:674). One glimpse at a map of Africa is enough to realize how stunningly artificial the continent's boundaries are. At the same time, these rigid African boundaries have proven to be remarkably stable, even after most African states acquired independence in the 1960s. As Thornton writes: 'All postcolonial countries in Africa have recognised and stated in the Organisation of African Unity charter (1963 Resolution) that their borders would be maintained even though they are consequences of geographic happenstance and rarely reflect real ethnic, social or linguistic boundaries on the ground' (Thornton in Werbner and Ranger 1996:148).

Through the lens of an ethnocultural perspective, nationhood would indeed be doomed to fail in the African context. In most African nation-states – with their great ethnic and linguistic diversity – stimulating a sense of nationhood along ethnocultural lines is problematic if not outright chanceless.<sup>13</sup> Civic and particularly constructivist

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<sup>13</sup> Writing about Shona identity in Zimbabwe, Ranger stresses the arbitrary nature of ethnic identities in Africa, another argument in support of the broader constructivist perspective (Ranger cited in Herbst 1989: 680).

understandings of nationhood, however, are very well applicable to the African context. In fact, the example of the ways in which national boundaries have been drawn and maintained in Africa demonstrates the strength of the constructivist perspective. The boundaries of African nations might be artificial, but they are not arbitrary. They were drawn up as part of a political project. As Herbst writes: 'It is important to judge boundaries – political creations – on the basis of their usefulness to those who created them' (1989:692). African boundary markers have been selected precisely in the manner that Barth's model described; namely not on the basis of objective, innate criteria but on the basis of the rational interests of powerful actors at the time of the colonization of Africa.

Arguably, what makes this process fundamentally different from political projects of boundary construction in Europe is the external 'ownership' of the project. The colonial boundaries of African nation-states have not been constructed by actors from within the communities involved, but directly imposed by external colonial powers. This point touches on the complex question of the power imbalances involved in the formulation of the discourse on nationhood. Indeed -as Billig (1995) suggested- the way of seeing the world as an international system of sovereign nation-states has become hegemonic and commonsensical, but this ideology was already firmly in place by the time African countries acquired independence. Arguably, those countries had little alternative routes as 'the established international norm was that the new members of the system of states should be nation-states' (Simpson 1994:464). Indeed, the boundaries drawn up in the colonial era were preserved by actors from within the communities in question after independence. The preservation of the colonial boundaries after independence can also be seen as a rational, interest-based response by postcolonial African leaders whose primary need was to maintain a stable status-quo (Herbst 1989:686). In this context, Simpson writes:

On the one hand it was an implicit recognition of the falsity of the myth of nation-statehood in much of the Third World, yet at the same time also a reflection of a willingness to go on pretending that there was such a thing as a Nigerian, Ethiopian or Sri Lankan nation that was coterminous with the territorial limits of the Nigerian, Ethiopian or Sri Lankan state [...] (1994:464).

Thus, in the interest of the political project of claiming and legitimizing the sovereignty of these countries, the communities needed to be imagined as nations through a myth of common nationhood. Adding to this process was the strong normative and imperative character of the ideology of nationhood. Until today, the political unit of the nation-stated remains the unquestioned, primary political unit of organization. Indeed, as we saw elsewhere in this chapter, even though the meanings of nations are always

contested, the question of the nation as a valid unit of political organization is virtually never posed. Therefore, the principle under which postcolonial societies achieved sovereign statehood, namely that of 'self determination', held that there was already a nation, despite all evidence to the contrary' (Simpson 1994:464). As is well-known, the consequences of these developments have been varied across the continent, leading to classifications of African nation-states from successful, to weak or even 'failed' states (e.g. Rotberg 2003).

### **Value of the constructivist perspective for studying African nationhood**

What the history of nationhood in Africa forcefully demonstrates is the manner in which the myth of nationhood can be employed for the social organization of difference, in more and less successful ways. Approached from a constructivist perspective, the juxtaposition between European, Western nation-states as organically grown, accomplished natural units versus the artificial and incomplete postcolonial nation-states breaks down. As Simpson stresses, particularly since the end of cold war, nation-states all over the world have experienced centrifugal trends, crises of identity, calls for autonomy or 'dissident sub-nationalism' (1994:465). The fact that European nation-states have developed over a much longer time-period in no way guarantees the success of these political projects, nor their irreversibility. In conclusion, Simpson writes that 'third world states are therefore not any longer seen to be a class of their own, and are in good company as far as their shortfalls in the field of nation-building are concerned' (Simpson 1994:465).

Importantly then, I believe the constructivist perspective argued for in this chapter is applicable to the study of processes of national identification outside of the European context from which many of the works it builds on originate. Furthermore, it should be stressed again that context is of key importance in the theoretical framework developed in this chapter. Theoretical insights on processes of national identification are meaningless if formulated in isolation from the concrete socio-historical contexts in which these processes are embedded. We need to be aware of the specificities of the historical context of African nationhood, the power relations involved and the (limited) degrees of freedom in constructing alternative boundaries. In Chapter Three, the development of South African discourses on nationhood will be sketched within such a broad socio-historical context. If anything, the history of South African nationhood demonstrates how nationhood is a political project that is never accomplished, but continuously in flux and changing with the changes in power relations between those pursuing different projects. In this chapter we will also see how a country's external boundaries may have stability



over time, but internal boundaries might be used to cut across a national community, constitute separate national communities within the population and so on.

## **Conclusion: approach to national identification**

The theoretical approach to processes of national identification taken in my study builds on important assumptions derived from the theoretical perspectives described in this chapter. Ultimately, what I wish to analyze is how constructions of national identity on a micro, everyday level of an individual utterance can be understood within a larger, macro-social context, of both more durable cultural repertoires and immediate, contingent events. In this concluding section I will outline the basic assumptions, derived from the theories discussed above, that underpin the approach followed in this study. In the final section I will describe what this approach means for studying the specific topic of national identity construction.

### *Identities are constituted in processes of social interaction*

The basis of my approach is a constructivist perspective on identities that regards identities not as fixed, pre-social entities or conditions but as dynamic products of processes of social interaction. My approach builds on a number of insights from Barth's model on the construction of ethnic groups. In my view, a number of core premises of his approach are highly relevant to our understanding of how groups are constituted. First among these is the idea that the markers of similarity and difference used to define groups are the products of processes of social interaction, and they are therefore highly relational. Which markers are selected is intrinsically linked to the specific social interactional setting, and the specific comparative context of that setting. A central insight that follows from this is that expressions of identity are always expressions of social relations, not only defining the own group but simultaneously defining groups of 'Others'. The consequence of viewing identities as the outcome of social interactions is that identities are not static, but will vary from one context to the next. The markers that define the identity are chosen in relation to the features of a specific context, and if the context changes the markers are bound to change too. An additional important insight that I borrow from Barth's work is the idea that there is an interest that drives the selection of identity markers in a given context. This insight can be translated to the idea described below of identity claims as strategic, intended to serve particular project in a particular context.

*Language plays a central role in the constitution of identities*

A second key assumption is that language plays a central role in the constitution of identities. Identities are not entities in themselves outside of the language used to describe them. The processes of boundary marking described by Barth -what he calls 'the social organization of difference'- are also fundamentally dependent on language. Notions of similarity and difference are constituted in language, in categorizations that form the basis for ideas about identities. These are reproduced and maintained in practices, of which language, discourse and talk are a primary example. Language is particularly important in the constitution of categorical identities. Because these identities involve larger than life communities, they are based on processes of imagining rather than on interpersonal relations. Within those processes of imagining, language is indispensable. In order to imagine themselves as a community, people need a language to talk about that community.

*Constructions of identity are variable across persons and across time*

The next basic assumption is that constructions of collective identity are variable across people and across time. Meanings given to an identity category by group members are bound to be diverse, and they are bound to be the subject of internal debate and contestation. Variability in constructions of identity is not only caused by variation in the comparative, intergroup setting (the significant others across the boundary) but also by diversity *within* the community. This diversity has two different dimensions. The first is that of intersectionality. As we have seen, individual members are differently positioned within a large-scale identity category and meanings attributed to an identity category intersect with other discourses of identity in which people participate. The second dimension is the idea that each construction of collective identity is an idiosyncratic remake, an individual appropriation of the meanings given to a particular category. Both dimensions play a key role in creating the internal variability in constructions of collective identity.

Constructions of collective identity are also temporally variable: they are not fixed in time but instead permanently 'in process', and never accomplished. They can and will vastly vary across different moments in time, and there are two dynamics at work in this variability. First of all, broader socio-political setting in which identities are constructed is not static. Dominant cultural repertoires may shift over time, and alternative repertoires may take their place. Additionally, important short-term changes such as the transformative events discussed above can have the effect of dramatically changing the circumstances in which people give meaning to identity categories. Secondly, as we have

seen in the work of Reicher and Hopkins (2001), individuals may forward very different versions of an identity on different occasions. As was convincingly demonstrated, the dynamic that was driving this variability was the fact that speakers were forwarding particular versions of the national identity as part of deliberate, strategic political projects. Variability across time is thus a two-way street: the context constantly changes and people are strategically adjusting their constructions of identity to that changing context.

*Identity claims are future-oriented actions upon the world*

Because identities are thus inevitably highly situational and variable, the analysis should not focus on identities as enduring conditions but instead on expressions of identities as claims, intended to perform a particular action in a particular context. Once we see expressions of identity as actions aimed at forwarding a particular version of the social world, it follows that at their core, all expressions of identity are ideological. This is if we follow a broad definition of ideologies as ‘bodies of knowledge [...] which make claims about the way the social world is and, crucially, about the way it ought to be’ (Jenkins 1997:84). The important premise of this perspective is that identity claims are future-oriented. They are about the promotion of a version of the social world – of the identity of the own community and that of other communities – that is not necessarily in line with the present situation, but that is aspired to for the future.

**Examining collective and idiosyncratic processes at once**

To understand how the national community is imagined on an everyday basis, we need to turn to processes of meaning-making within the national community. Only then can we begin to unravel the complex processes involved in the imagining of the national community. On the basis of the theories discussed in this chapter we can conclude that constructions of national identity are always simultaneously collective and shared, on the one hand, and individual or idiosyncratic, on the other. An empirical analysis of processes of national identification should be able to examine precisely this paradoxical dimension.

One part of the puzzle lies in mapping out the elements that make up the collective, cultural repertoires about the nation. What are the different ways in which the national narrative is being told? On this level, we have seen that symbolism plays an important role as a means to transform the large-scale, anonymous national community into a concrete, familiar, horizontal community of comradeship. We also saw that collective repertoires about the nation commonly cluster around the themes of people, time and place. These cultural repertoires, being embedded in historical and cultural processes, can acquire a degree of stability across time. It is also at this level that the different

ideological perspectives on the nation play an important role, as they may offer the content-material for narrating the nation in various ways. It is crucial to emphasize once again that multiple versions of the nation may circulate on the collective level. Different ideological perspectives will inform the meanings given to the three themes of people, time and place, and result in very different outcomes, with potentially different material consequences. In that sense, collective repertoires about the nation are as much 'actions upon the world' as individual expressions are. This is most clearly the case in processes of nation building, in which a particular version of the nation is deliberately forwarded on multiple levels of the public domain in order to serve the political project of building a particular kind of national society.

The second step is to begin to unravel the different processes that cause national identities to be reproduced in such variable, fragmented and dynamic ways. If we focus our analysis on 'where the action is' – at the level of the constitution of identities in talk – the key question we need to ask is 'why is this person expressing this particular version of the identity category in this setting'? As Reicher and Hopkins write, we must ask 'what is achieved by defining national identity in this way?' (2001:26). For the answer to that question we need to zoom in on the specific features of that setting, and the factors that feed into that specific, idiosyncratic remake of the identity category. This involves an analysis of the specific position of the speaker within the broader community – an analysis that is sensitive to dynamics of intersectionality. In addition, it involves analyzing what the action-orientation of the claim may be in its specific context in front of a specific present and virtual audience, and in response to specific events. Similar to the cultural repertoires discussed above, events belong to the realm of collectively available 'material', to be re-appropriated by individuals in their constructions of national identity. But contrary to cultural repertoires, events commonly do not acquire a degree of historical continuity. They are immediate, often unplanned and unpredicted, and they confront the individual with a set of changed circumstances against which to formulate his or her account on national identity. As we have seen in the discussion on events invoking national identity, the interpretation of events in itself can become part of a project, of an action upon the world. How the event is feeding into the construction of identity – how it is accommodated within the identity project that is being pursued – can therefore be highly variable across contexts.

All these questions can only be addressed through a comprehensive approach, in which features of the immediate, situated context are analyzed in relation to features of the collective, macro-social context. The idea of discursive constructions of national identity

as actions upon the world is a good starting point for this multifaceted analysis. In Chapter Four on Methodology, I will set out a specific methodological approach that is able integrate these different levels of analysis. Before moving on to that subject, I will first set the scene for the South African-based empirical study, by addressing the question of nationhood in South Africa in Chapter Three.

## Chapter 3: South African nationhood in a historical perspective

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### Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I proposed that the first step in the analysis of processes of national identification was to identify collectively available repertoires about the nation that individual speakers are drawing on in their talk. I also suggested that important sources for these collective repertoires about nationhood were political discourses on nationhood. Political discourses on nationhood are intrinsically ideological: they present a particular version of the nation as part of a particular political project. The different ideological perspectives on nationhood described in Chapter Two – ethnocultural, civic and multicultural nationhood – can all serve to define the boundaries of belonging to the national community in various ways, as well as the relations between groups of people. If they then become institutionalized via legislation and other concrete policies, they become very real – and, as South African history demonstrates, disastrous – in their consequences for the everyday lives of the people involved.

If we want to recognize elements of collective ideological repertoires within the talk of ‘ordinary people’, we need to be familiar with the broader historical and political contexts in which these repertoires developed. We need to have knowledge of the complex social and historical processes in which different meanings are embedded (Wetherell and Potter 1992). What are the competing representations of the nation that have been historically available in this context, and what were the political projects behind those representations? One important purpose of the current chapter is to sketch that socio-historical background of South African nationhood. I will describe the ways in which nationhood has been formulated at the political level throughout the twentieth century. The aim is to illustrate how the category of the South African nation has been given a range of meanings that served to support different political projects (see also Norval 1996).

What matters most for the current study is the political and ideological landscape of the post-apartheid era, since this constitutes the broader macro-social context in which my

respondents are talking about their nation. Indeed, the larger part of the chapter will focus on this era. However, we must understand the ideological foundations of post-apartheid South Africa in relation to its predecessor, apartheid South Africa. To understand how the post-apartheid government had to develop both an entirely new vision of nationhood and a whole new social order, we must take a closer look at the types of identities the 'old' South Africa produced and institutionalized. This also involves examining the counter-narratives on South African identity that were developed by the liberation movement before 1994, during apartheid South Africa. This is all the more important because the legacy of those identities and discourses continues to play a role today. In Chapter One, I quoted Sparks, who spoke of a division running through South Africa's psyche. We cannot assume that the divisive identity repertoires that lay at the root of that division evaporated at the moment of the first democratic elections of 1994. Moreover, the material consequences of the apartheid project continue to shape everyday realities. It is for these reasons that this chapter starts off with an overview of the question of nationhood in the apartheid era.

In this first part of this chapter, I will describe the history of meanings given to national identity and other key collective identities in South Africa from the era of segregationism at the start of the twentieth century until the transition to democracy in the early 1990s. I will also briefly set out the visions of nationhood that developed within the liberation movement. In the second part of the chapter, I will describe the ideological underpinnings of the 'new South Africa', through a discussion of the ideological positions articulated by its first presidents, Mandela and Mbeki. In addition to describing the different political discourses, I will discuss a few important social developments in post-apartheid South Africa. These are important as they relate to questions of belonging, and in- and exclusion in contemporary South Africa. How have different population groups re-articulated their identities post-apartheid and how do they position themselves within the new nation?

The discussion of the ideological debate in the Mbeki era is specifically important because it describes the socio-political climate that formed the backdrop of this study (2007-2008). A central political event in this period was the political succession battle between the then President Mbeki and the current President Zuma. In the closing section of the main body of the chapter, I will briefly look at some of the symbolic issues related to South African identity that the succession battle brought to the fore.

## **South African nationhood before the 1994 transition**

If there is one lesson to be learned from the history of South Africa, it is how identity politics can be employed to the extreme in order to pursue particular political projects. During the course of its history, South African nationhood has proven to be a site of fierce ideological contestation. If anything, the history of nationhood in South Africa confirms the social constructionist idea that nationhood and the boundaries of nation are intrinsically dynamic products of social interaction. At the same time, there is potential for change, since South African history has shown that dominant ideologies on nationhood and the social orders that flow from them can shift in response to substantial macro-social and political changes.

### **White supremacy and Afrikaner nationalism**

The territory of South Africa has long since been inhabited by a diverse population ranging from indigenous Khoi Khoi and San people, Africans from other parts of Africa, European migrants from countries such as the Netherlands, France and Germany ('the Afrikaners'), and from British colonial settlers to descendants of both migrants and slaves from India, Madagascar and Indonesia. Until 1994, the majority of this population was excluded from South African nationhood and citizenship rights.

Since the arrival of European migrants in the seventeenth century, systems of racial hierarchy that establish and maintain white supremacy have been in place. Visions of a South African nationhood first began to take hold towards the end of the nineteenth century, on the eve of the establishment of the Union of South Africa (1910). The establishment of a modern centralised state in the form of the Union was triggered by a need to facilitate effective labour exploitation in the gold and diamond mining industries (Maré 2005). Sharp racial boundaries were drawn around the South African nation of the Union, restricting nationhood and citizenship to whites (Ramutsindela 1997:101). This type of exclusive racialized nationhood would remain in place during the following eighty years of white minority rule.

That nationhood was made a whites-only affair and that the primary boundary was that between European and 'native' does not mean that meanings of nationhood were uncontested within the white community. The homogeneity of the white community was never a given due to the strong historical antagonism between the British and the Afrikaners, amplified by the memories of the Boer wars of the late nineteenth century (Norval 1996:99). Strong, essentialist notions of an ethnocultural nationhood have always played an important role in the collective imagination of the Afrikaner community. The Afrikaner community in South Africa is made up of descendants of European migrants of



primarily Dutch, German and French descent, who had migrated to South Africa ever since the Dutch VOC settlement at the Cape in 1652. They share the language of 'Afrikaans' – a language derived from Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – and a religious affiliation with the Dutch Reformed Church. Afrikaner nationalists have cultivated a sense of religious pre-destination: seeing Afrikaners as 'God's chosen people' (Quispel 1999:31). With regard to notions of place, Afrikaners developed a sense of being indigenous to the territory of South Africa, of being a 'white tribe of Africa' (Dubow 1992:234). This sentiment is at the root of the Afrikaner sense of and claim to autochthony that continues to be important today. Afrikaner nationalism has thus historically been based on the ethnocultural model of nationhood. The social order that followed from the Afrikaner nationalist ideology was of Afrikaners as a separate nation (or 'Volk') unto themselves, to be distinguished from other ethnoculturally bounded 'nations' or 'volkere' (Norval (1996), Quispel (1999). Drawing boundaries to distinguish their own identity from that of a series of hierarchically defined others has always been a key characteristic of Afrikaner nationalism (Norval 1996). Afrikaner nationalism found political expression in the Afrikaner National Party, established in 1914. Initially, boundaries were based on ethnocultural criteria and the first 'Other' was the British settler community:

At first the development of Afrikaner nationalism was [...] closely linked to anti-British feelings, and growing awareness of the threat posed by British imperialism was an important factor in its awakening (Quispel 1999:33).

With the establishment of the racially defined South African nation in the Union of South Africa, Afrikaner nationalist discourse had to be re-articulated to allow for the construction of a common nationhood of whiteness (Maré 2005:246). Boundaries were redrawn – this time along sharp racial lines – between the white community and a non-white, black 'Other' that was denied citizenship in the new polity. Furthermore, as a result of an elaborate system of 'forced' labour, the dividing lines of colour and class came to coincide (Alexander 2003:34). The separate cultural identities of Afrikaner and British were to be preserved, but they were 'to be like one in the face of the outside world' (Quispel 1999:35). Through the segregationist policies of the new state (for instance in the Land Act), the governance of everyday life was increasingly organized along the lines of racialised hierarchy, 'as access to work, urban space, political office, public transport and leisure facilities became subject to racial surveillance' (Posel 2001:54).

### **Grand apartheid, separate development and the multi-national state**

After the conservative Afrikaner nationalists of the National Party triumphed in the 1948 elections, racialized hierarchical differentiation in the form of apartheid became the official governing principle. The core of apartheid was legislation that locked people up in fixed, essentialist, racial-identity categories, which became the key determinant of people's access to both political and economic resources. The quintessential piece of legislation for this purpose was the Population Registration Act of 1950 which enforced the classification of all inhabitants of South Africa into four racial categories: 'White', 'Coloured', 'Indian/Asiatic' and 'Native' (later called 'Bantu' or African) (Butler 2004). On the basis of this classification, the apartheid state enforced an all-encompassing system of segregation, separating people's residential areas, social amenities, schools, work places and social relations on the basis of race. As Posel writes:

Apartheid's principal imaginary was of a society in which every 'race' knew and observed its proper place – economically, politically and socially (2001:52).

The devastating effect of this policy was more than just a material, geographical division; it created a deep psychological division. This psychological division was amplified by apartheid state propaganda which imposed stereotypes and misrepresentations of other groups (Zegeye 2001:20).

Norval (1996) describes how the discourse of nationhood underlying the apartheid policy evolved and was re-articulated in the decades after 1948 as a reaction to both internal and external developments. While in the first decades the idea of a distinct Afrikaner Volk was still very central, the apartheid ideologues shifted course in the 1960s under President Verwoerd. Under his reign, 'Grand Apartheid' was effectuated with the establishment of the separate development policy. In this period the idea of a multi-national South Africa gained ground.

The notion of a united white nation was once again given a new impulse. But more importantly, the notion of multi-nationalism was imposed on the black African community in an attempt to break the black power base. The African racial category was broken down into ethnic groups. The underlying premise was that black Africans could be separated into eight distinct ethnic identities or 'nations to be' that would each develop a separate national identity and be entitled to political autonomy in their own designated, ethnically homogenous 'homelands'.<sup>14</sup> As Thornton so clearly points out, the history of South African nationhood is not only marked by the external borders of the country but

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<sup>14</sup> KwaZulu was not a nominally independent homeland like Venda or Bophuthatswana but a 'dependent but self-governing homeland' (Thornton 1996:149).

by many internal boundaries, recent ones but also many 'phantom' boundaries from the apartheid past (Thornton 1996:149). The idea of the homelands was that each group would actually construct a sense of separate nationhood within these homelands, through culture and heritage, and even flags, anthems, sporting teams and parliaments (Zegeye 2001:20, Chidester et al. 2003:307). This notoriously failed in a number of instances, such as in the case of the 'Ciskei' (anonymous in Vail 1989:395). The ideology of nationhood that underpinned the political project of Grand Apartheid was one of essentialized, ethnocultural nationhood, but the artificial, constructed nature of these ethnocultural nations was bluntly obvious. For example, the shifting boundaries around the 'South African national community' – from a separate, ethnocultural Afrikaner nation to a united, racially bounded 'white nation' – illustrated the ways in which boundary markers were reformulated for political ends. The new policy pretended to be built on formal equality between each of South Africa's 'nations'. In practice, based on their ethnic classification, people were forcibly moved to overpopulated homelands that were lacking in employment, industry and agricultural land (Butler 2004:19). Between 1960 and 1989, 3.5 million people were forcibly removed (Butler 2004:19). The core of the South African economy remained outside of these black homelands, in designated 'white areas'.

### **Ambivalently positioned: the 'Coloured' and Indian communities**

People designated as 'Coloured' or Indian were positioned within the apartheid system in a way that had the effect of distinguishing them in a hierarchical manner from the black community. Separate structures were set up to provide distinct and segregated public services and limited forms of political participation for the two communities. As a result, Coloured and Indian communities were slightly advantaged compared to the black African community but disadvantaged compared to whites. This was part of the central strategy of the apartheid state to divide the non-white population in order to prevent the formation of united resistance movements. While the black African population was being relocated to homelands under the separate development policy, 'no coincidence could be found between nationhood and territory' in the case of Coloureds and Indians (Norval 1996:217). Hence, no 'homelands' were designated for either group. The artificial character of the categories was particularly clear in the case of the Coloured community, whose place within the apartheid ideology was 'characterized by its irrepresentability within the discourse of nationhood' (Norval 1996:188). The heterogeneous group of people classified as Coloured had one thing in common: they were of mixed parentage, being the descendants of mixed relationships between European settlers and Khoi San or Africans (Zegeye 2001:8). The apartheid government had a strategic interest in deemphasizing the African roots of coloured people and fostering the development of a

separate Coloured identity. At the same time, including them in the group classified as white was equally problematic, as it did not fit in with the governing ideology of racial purity. Farred writes about the Coloured community:

This is a community that is [...] neither black nor white, yet both. [...] this ambivalent condition identifies coloured South Africans as a group that was historically disenfranchised and yet partially also enfranchised, precariously situated between the traditional oppressor and the oppressed majority (2003:178).

A similar ambivalence can be said to characterize the historical position of the Indian community in South Africa. Later in this chapter, I will pay attention to the Indian community in the context of the specific demographic composition of the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

### **Versions of nationhood within the liberation movement**

An essentialist, racially exclusive discourse provided the dominant ideological version of the nation in the apartheid era. Opposition to apartheid would eventually centre around its counter-discourse, based on an ideology of 'non-racialism', in which elements of both civic and multicultural nationalism are combined. Norval writes:

For a resistance project to succeed, a logic different to that of apartheid discourse had to be developed, a logic which would not simply constitute a reversal of that project; one which could not be reabsorbed into its already existing systems of exclusions and differences (1996:171).

The core of the ideology of non-racialism was the idea of a united South African nation, inclusive of all its inhabitants, the extension of full citizenship rights to all, and a firm rejection of all racial and ethnic labels. Non-racialism is defined not only by what it positively seeks to promote but equally by what it wishes to overcome: apartheid. The goal of non-racialism is the constitution of a society in which race is gradually made irrelevant in the political terrain and in public life in general (Taylor and Foster 1999:331). It is an ideology that promotes a radically different social order from the racialized hierarchical order of apartheid ideology (Norval 1996:293).

Non-racialism has not been the leading principle of the resistance movement from the beginning. The African National Congress, as established in 1912 (as a reaction to the racially exclusive Act of the Union), originally adhered to a multi-racial vision for South Africa, taking the racial categories of the apartheid state as a given, and aiming to bring about multiracial harmony and equality between these different racial groups (Alexander 2003). This perspective had to compete with Africanist ideologies built on the idea that

South Africa belonged to Africans alone (Ramutsindela 1997).<sup>15</sup> In 1955, the Congress of the People<sup>16</sup> drafted its influential Freedom Charter.<sup>17</sup> It opened with the phrase:

We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know, that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black or white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people.

In the 1960s, in the context of the increasing brutality of the apartheid regime, the Black Consciousness Movement of Steve Biko emerged – arguably out of disenchantment with the ANC’s multi-racial undertones (Alexander 2003:40). Under the impact of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), the boundaries between the different identity categories of non-whites were brought into question. Black Consciousness’ aim was ‘the psychological liberation of all black people’ (Zegeye 2001:10). The boundaries of the category ‘black’ were redrawn to include Indians and ‘Coloureds’. ‘Black’ people were to constitute one group, by virtue of their common oppression under the white minority regime.<sup>18</sup> Where fixed identity categories were the key principle of the apartheid state’s divide and rule policy, re-articulating those categories and taking ownership of identification was a powerful symbolic act. In the late 1970s, in the wake of the violently repressed Soweto uprising of 1976, the mass struggle against apartheid intensified. While initially the BCM ideology of black unity was hegemonic, an even more inclusive version of non-racialism gained ground, specifically within the Congress alliance. The emergence of the United Democratic Front in 1983 was a true manifestation of that broad, non-racial outlook. The UDF united people across racial and ethnic lines – including white liberals – under the ideal of a non-racial, democratic South Africa. The ANC had by then firmly shifted from a multi-racial perspective to a non-racial perspective (Taylor and Foster 1999:328). For the ANC, non-racialism does not mean the denial or suppression of difference. What matters is that difference is no longer a basis for exclusion and inequality. Striking the right balance between non-racialism and equality, on the one hand, and recognition of cultural difference, on the other, has been a long-standing concern for the ANC, one that would carry over into the post-apartheid dispensation. It explains some of the ideological contradictions inherent in the post-apartheid nation-building project.

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<sup>15</sup> In 1959 the Pan African Congress was established as a breakaway movement from the ANC that adhered to an Africanist ideology.

<sup>16</sup> The South African Congress Alliance united the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress.

<sup>17</sup> Scholars disagree on the question of whether the Freedom Charter actually proposed a non-racial or a multi-racial society. Ramutsindela (1997) for instance suggests that a vision for a non-racial South Africa was enshrined in the Charter, while Alexander (2003) sees it as a plea for a multi-racial society.

<sup>18</sup> In the language of the National Party, ‘black’ was strictly limited to Africans.

## The province of KwaZulu-Natal

### Zulu nationalism

As my study is situated in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, I will describe a few relevant historical and demographical details of the province in this section. The province of KwaZulu-Natal is home to South Africa's largest community of Zulu-speaking persons, who make up 86% of the population (Statistics South Africa 2004:14). With regard to nationhood, this is an important feature because of the development of a specific ideology of Zulu nationalism. While the artificial construction of ethnocultural national identities in many instances failed (Maré 2005), the picture was more complex in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The province has a specific history of struggle and resistance of the Zulu people against both colonisation and apartheid. A central figure in this history is the legendary King Shaka, and other well-known kings such as Chetswayo, who successfully fought the British troops at Isandlwana during the Anglo-Zulu war in 1879 (Dlamini 2005:31). Traditional Zulu structures such as the Royal House have persevered into modern times. Indeed, as Sitas describes, there is:

[...] a sense in the popular imagination, usually constructed by the media and embellished in everyday conversation, that there is something different, insubordinate and robust about the province (2009:1).

By consequence, more so than in other designated homelands, in the homeland of KwaZulu viable sources of a separate ethnic Zulu identity were available for mobilisation. These resources were used and abused, misrepresented by the apartheid state to 'justify the racially motivated homeland structure of KwaZulu-Natal' (Dlamini 2005:31). Inkatha, a Zulu cultural movement established in 1922, was re-activated in the apartheid era and turned into a Zulu nationalist political party under leadership of Mangosuthu Buthelezi. By being put in charge of the KwaZulu Homeland in the 1970s, the Inkatha Freedom Party became entrenched in the power structure of the apartheid state. It also became the most important black mobiliser of ethnicity. While Inkatha attempted to promote itself as an African liberation movement, it simultaneously embraced an exclusivist, narrow Zulu nationalism. Inkatha appropriated and amended Zulu history to pursue its nationalist project. In order to sustain justification for the KwaZulu homeland, it presented the Zulus as a homogenous, well-defined cultural group, and itself and the Zulu nation as synonymous. It appealed to traditional values, ethnic loyalties, patriarchy and hierarchy (Dlamini 2005) – values far removed from those of the Congress-based liberation movement discussed above. For the apartheid state, Inkatha served to reinforce its political project of separate development.

At the same time, it is incorrect to present KwaZulu-Natal as a one-dimensional cradle of Zulu nationalism. On the contrary, the African National Congress and other liberation movements have always had a strong presence in the province. . Thus, the history of the province has been characterized by strongly competing political ideologies, culminating in 'the unofficial war' (Taylor 2002, Kentridge 1990) at the end of the 1980s. At the time when apartheid was coming to an end in most of the country, the province of KwaZulu-Natal was torn by political strife between the Inkatha Freedom Party (covertly supported by apartheid state security forces) and the joint ANC and UDF. The violence that raged from 1987 until the mid-1990s, took as many as 20,000 lives (Taylor 2002:473), created sharp dividing lines, and caused a pervasive sense of animosity and trauma throughout the towns and villages of the province. The violence was particularly fierce in the three months leading up to the 1994 democratic elections. It was only by mid-1996 that the political conflict was declared over (Taylor 2002:474). In 1999, a provincial coalition government was formed that involved both Inkatha and ANC. In recent years, power relations have shifted clearly in favour of the ANC and the province is now regarded as an ANC stronghold, with the biggest ANC membership figures in the nation. It is also the home province and electoral stronghold of the current President, Jacob Zuma (Sitas 2009).

### **A significant minority: the 'Indian' community in KwaZulu-Natal**

An important population group in KwaZulu-Natal is the so called 'Indian' Community which makes up 8.1% of the population of the province (Statistics South Africa 2004:14) and 12% of the municipality of Msunduzi in which this study is situated (Piper 2010:3). Indian South Africans descend from migrants from the Indian subcontinent who arrived in what is now KwaZulu-Natal in the second half of the nineteenth century either as indentured labourers or as independent merchants. These groups were greatly diverse in terms of language, religion, culture, ethnicity, provenance and class; yet they were forced into one single identity category under the Population Registration Act. Within the literature it has been argued that people may come to internalize an imposed identity through the lived experience of sharing a common fate (Jenkins 2008:173). Arguably, this is what has happened to the Indian community, for whom sharing a collective fate as members of a small oppressed minority squeezed between the white dominant minority and black disadvantaged majority fostered internal solidarity. Outside threats, such as hostility from both the white and African communities, served to strengthen the closed community identity (Hart and Padayachee 2000:688). In KwaZulu-Natal, historical tensions between black Africans and Indians culminated in racial riots in 1949. The image of Indians being beneficiaries of apartheid was strengthened by apartheid state

propaganda. Negative stereotypes, such as that of the Indian as exploitative trader, were persistent in the black African community. According to Hart and Padayachee (2000:689): '[...] it was one of the boasts of the National Party regime that the Indians were a great success story for apartheid and this myth continues to haunt the Indian community today'. But the other side of the story is that significant parts of the Indian community supported and participated in the anti-apartheid resistance movement. A common opposition against apartheid served to build bridges between the different non-white communities and to transcend racialised identities (Zegeye 2001).

That some of the historical Indo-African tensions have nevertheless continued into the post-apartheid era became evident in the 2002 affair around the derogatory song 'amaNdiya' (Zulu for 'Indian') by the playwright Ngema. The song criticized Indians for their alleged sense of superiority over black Africans (Vahed and Desai 2010:3). In the post-apartheid context, Indians are said to experience insecurity about their belonging in South Africa for similar reasons as those of the white minority. As Mishra phrases it: 'Though many feel at home they feel not deemed to be self-evidently the face of the nation' (Mishra 2007:37). I will address these contemporary feelings of exclusion later in the chapter.

A final characteristic of KwaZulu-Natal that deserves mention here is the fact that its white population is predominantly English-speaking. Compared to the rest of South Africa, the number of Afrikaans-speaking persons is relatively low in the province: 1.5% of the KwaZulu-Natal population versus 13.3% of the population of South Africa as a whole (Statistics South Africa 2001:21).

## **Apartheid South Africa's international position**

On the international stage, apartheid South Africa gradually acquired a position of a pariah. Since the victory of the National Party in 1948, international criticism of the apartheid government had grown, reaching a peak in the 1960s in reaction to Pretoria's harsh oppression of black protests within South Africa. In 1973, the General Assembly of the United Nations branded apartheid a crime against humanity. The homelands policy and the artificially constructed nations could not count on international recognition. Over the years, apartheid became the universal symbol of racism and unjust discrimination, and the struggle against it grew into a major international cause (Zegeye 2001:12). Various sanctions, such as those in the economic and sports spheres, were imposed. More and more international organizations took a clear stand against apartheid, and in many countries apartheid became a prominent topic of public concern. At the same time,



the position of the international community – and particularly ‘Western’ nation-states – towards the apartheid government remained ambivalent. This was due to trade relations and economic interests in South Africa, as well as the geopolitical context of the Cold War.

Within Africa, solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement was strong. As more and more African states gained independence, the sentiment grew that as long as black South Africans were not free, the continent was not free. In the 1970s, South Africa increasingly became isolated within the Southern African region, and surrounded by newly liberated states with left-wing governments. This triggered feelings of threat within the South African regime, leading to its destabilization campaigns in neighbouring countries. These developments resulted in a complex and ambivalent relationship between South Africa and its neighbours – an ambivalence that has partially carried over to the post-apartheid context.

Challenges from the resistance movement as well as international pressure and sanctions forced a continual redefinition of the apartheid project (Norval 1996:309). In the late 1980s, apartheid hegemony was in such a crisis that redefinition had reached its limit and the end of apartheid neared. The first concrete, important step was the unbanning of the liberation movement organisations (ANC and PAC) and the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, a prelude to the end of the apartheid state.

## **The Mandela years: the birth of the Rainbow Nation**

The challenges of the historical transition from apartheid to democracy were enormous. The apartheid system was such an all-encompassing system that only a full-fledged new social order would suffice. In the early 1990s, in the context of ongoing political violence and threats from the extreme right, this seemed a daunting task. That South Africa succeeded in averting a civil war and building a liberal democracy against all odds is a truly remarkable achievement, arguably one of the most significant events of the twentieth century (Alexander et al. 2006:1). So drastic was the change in South Africa that it is often metaphorically described in terms of a process of birth or rebirth (Evans 2010), and South Africa described as ‘a miracle nation’ (by Archbishop Tutu). This successful transition in itself was and continues to be a most significant resource of national pride.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Researchers at the University of Chicago suggested in a recent report that newer, postcolonial nations commonly tend to have high levels of national pride because they formed their identities through conflicts that bound their people together and served to create a national story (Smith and Kim 2006; see commentary by Smith on website <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/nationalpride-norc.htm>)

The 'birth' of 'the new South Africa' was, however, a carefully executed birth: behind the scenes of public, historical events – such as Mandela's release from prison, the first democratic elections or Mandela's presidential inauguration – the terms of the transition were negotiated rather than enforced. It is not without reason that South Africa's transition to democracy has become known as a 'negotiated revolution' (Zegeye 2001, Chidester et al. 2003:309).

When it comes to national identity, post-apartheid South Africa had to be imagined in wholly new ways, and the narrative on South African national identity had to be rewritten, both for domestic and international audiences. On a domestic level a new sense of national community, of an imagined national 'Us' (Billig 1995) would have to be developed. This was all the more challenging because imaginings of 'Us' and 'Them' in the old South Africa had cut right across the society. On an international level, South Africa would have to re-articulate its own identity and position itself within the world of nations.

In this new imagery of the South African nation the figure of Nelson Mandela plays a leading role. Evans (2010:317) argues that Mandela has acquired a 'saint-like image' that was 'employed in the imagining of the new nation as united, reconciled, and investment worthy'. During his extraordinarily long term in the harsh prison of Robben Island Mandela had become a true icon, a symbol of the anti-apartheid struggle, both within and outside of South Africa. The enormous impact, even mystique, of his persona is sometimes described as 'Madiba Magic' (Vale and Taylor 1999). The following quote reflects the tremendous popular expectations at the moment of Mandela's release:

At the prison to greet him, thousands of South Africans, black and white, pinning their hopes on a hero, until today a revered symbol of the fight against apartheid, from today a political leader they believe commands enough support from black majority and white minority to negotiate an end to white rule (BBC report on Mandela's release in 1990, quoted in Evans 2010:315).

As the most important political leader in the transition to democracy, Mandela's tone, his behaviour and his discourse would have a decisive impact on the way in which the new South Africa would be imagined. In Mandela's discourse on the new South Africa, a number of themes are central: non-racialism, equality, reconciliation and unity in diversity. He had already articulated his vision of society when he was tried at the Rivonia Trial in 1964, words he repeated on his release from prison 27 years later:

I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

As discussed above, the ideology of non-racialism was clearly formulated as a counter discourse to the racist apartheid ideology. In the same vein, the identity of post-apartheid South Africa is very clearly asserted against apartheid South Africa. To use theoretical terms: the significant 'Other' against which the post-apartheid South Africa asserts its own identity is first and foremost apartheid South Africa. At the same time, post-apartheid South Africa would not deny cultural differences or enforce a homogenizing nationalist project. It would acknowledge cultural diversity but transform it as a marker for difference and exclusion into a source of pride, unity and inclusion.

The latter ambition was symbolized in the metaphor of South Africa as a Rainbow Nation. First coined by Archbishop Tutu but taken over enthusiastically by Mandela, the image of South Africa as 'the Rainbow Nation' obtained a central place in the public imagination (Baines 1998:3). A good example of the Rainbow spirit can be found in this quote from Mandela:

We [South Africans] have, in real life, declared our allegiance to justice, non racialism and democracy; our yearning for a peaceful and harmonious nation of equals. The Rainbow has become the symbol of our nation. We are turning the variety of our languages and cultures, once used to divide us, into a source of strength and richness.<sup>20</sup>

The Rainbow Nation metaphor has not only featured in political rhetoric but has also been disseminated widely in media campaigns (Baines 1998:3) and is ritually celebrated at public ceremonies and international sports events. The key message of the metaphor, Baines suggests, is that:

The Rainbow is incomplete without each of the colours, but none of the colours is dominant over the other. Thus the rainbow implies the co-existence of individual and collective identities, a representation of different cultures and of a shared South Africanness (1998:7).<sup>21</sup>

The ideology of nationhood that underpins the Rainbow Nation discourse is a combination of both civic and multicultural elements. On the one hand, it builds strongly on the multiculturalist idea of the recognition and celebration of ethnic diversity within the nation, and the recognition of minority rights. Diversity, in this perspective, becomes the *defining* characteristic of South African national identity; it becomes the dimension of life South Africans all share. Duly aware of the fear of a 'majoritarian threat' among minority groups, Mandela made a strong effort to counter anxieties and a sense of alienation among minority communities (Mangcu 2003:106). His version of nationalism

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<sup>20</sup> Nelson Mandela Message on Reconciliation Day, December 16<sup>th</sup> 1995.

<sup>21</sup> In the Rainbow Nation discourse, the colours of the Rainbow are not taken literally to represent particular racial groups, but rather to symbolise South Africa's diversity in an unspecified way.

was deliberately a 'negotiated nationalism', taking the interests of different groups into account (Chidester et al. 2003:309). The artefacts of nationhood that were to represent the new Rainbow Nation were all products of these negotiations. The national anthem, integrating elements of four different historical anthems, is a perfect example. In the national flag, elements of South Africa's separate flags of the old days have been reworked into a colourful design, symbolizing the convergence of diverse elements in South Africa taking the road ahead in unity (Bornman 2006:384).

On the other hand, Mandela's rhetoric builds on civic nationalist themes such as a shared commitment to and pride in public institutions of the state and civil society, a shared connection to the territory of South Africa and a common public culture. The Constitution, adopted in 1996, is a clear reflection of this combined civic and multicultural approach:

As a broad framework, the South African Constitution affirms unity and diversity, establishing the basis for a common citizenship in a non-racial, non-sexist and unified South Africa, while at the same time, recognising and protecting ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity (Chidester et al. 2003:297).

An inclusive sense of 'South Africanness' was fostered in the context of sports and leisure. Celebrity achievements by South Africans were appropriated in the nation-building project (Van der Westhuizen 2008:51). International sports events became occasions where the spirit of Rainbowism was extensively celebrated. Legendary is the moment Mandela sported a Springbok Rugby Shirt in support of the nearly all-white South African rugby team at the Rugby World Cup Final in 1995. This was arguably the point at which many in the Afrikaner community decided to embrace the new president, and with him the new dispensation. To give another example, Nugent (2010) emphasizes the role of food in fostering South African identity. There has been a deliberate attempt, Nugent argues, to celebrate a common love for certain foods in South Africa. The most famous is clearly the 'braai' – a typical South African way of cooking meat on an open fire – something that South Africans across race groups identify with and enjoy.<sup>22</sup>

### **People: ensuring inclusion of all**

The most important ideological function of the Rainbow ideology appears to be on the level of people: it tells a particular story of how the inhabitants of South Africa relate to each other as people. On the one hand, it names, highlights and preserves the cultural distinctiveness of different groups of people. On the other, it promotes a sense of

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<sup>22</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu has apparently thrown his weight behind a campaign to celebrate the braai as a South African heritage.  
([http://www.sagoodnews.co.za/general/south\\_africans\\_fire\\_up\\_the\\_braai\\_for\\_heritage\\_holiday.html](http://www.sagoodnews.co.za/general/south_africans_fire_up_the_braai_for_heritage_holiday.html))

inclusive unity between these different groups, despite, or, as its proponents would have it, thanks to their diversity. By contrast, racial diversity is to be approached in the exact opposite manner. According to the ideology of non-racialism, race should be made irrelevant as a factor in public life. Through the ideology of non-racialism, a clear break with the segregationist ideologies of the past is promoted.

The Rainbow ideology thus aims at two potentially contradictory goals. South Africans have the freedom and opportunity to maintain their own particular cultural identities, while feeling part of the broader, inclusive nation at the same time. The ideology promotes an inclusive, horizontal multiculturalism, implying that all subcultures are equal and no culture is more authentic to South Africa than another. The Rainbow ideology thus aims at a delicate balance between recognizing and celebrating cultural diversity and avoiding racial polarization and segregation. The main social project that is promoted is a nation where all different South African subcultures are at home, where all feel equally included. With these aims, the ideology first and foremost targets the South African domestic audience.

Some scholars argue that the Rainbow repertoire makes essentialist, primordial notions of ethnicity *the* defining experience of all South Africans and contradicts the ideology of non-racialism (De Cock and Bernstein 2002, Taylor and Foster 1999, Alexander 2003). This resembles the general ambiguity between equality and diversity or difference that is inherent in the ideology of multicultural nationhood, as discussed in Chapter Two. In the terms of the theoretical framework it could be argued that this constitutes an 'ideological dilemma'. Questions such as these put the finger on the internal tensions in the ideological make up of Mandela's post-apartheid South Africa. Interestingly, Comaroff and Comaroff have suggested that this compromise between two different discourses – one based on a liberal ethos of human rights and the other based on group rights and primordial cultural connections – is not a uniquely South African phenomenon, but applicable to many postcolonial African states (referred to in Zegeye 2001).

### **Time: Dealing with the past or a focus on the future?**

Another particularly challenging question within the post-apartheid nation-building project was that of dealing with the past. A sense of continuity from the past into the present is an important theme in discourses on nationhood, but one that is problematic in the South African context. In a society whose 'psyche' – to echo Sparks – has been divided for so long, there is not one past, and experiences of the past will be impacted by the specific way the legacy of apartheid affected a person's racial or other group. Maré (2005:509) writes:

In South Africa our memories are fragmented, they hang, or are perceived to hang, from different trees, never mind discrete branches. One social group has been left with one set of experiences, another with something totally different.

A more fruitful resource for building a shared national identity in this context is a clear break with the past, and a focus on building a common destiny and future. This is precisely what Mandela's nation-building project was about. A recurrent, future-oriented theme running through many of his speeches was that of 'building a better life for all'. He actively called upon his audience to cultivate a sense of 'new patriotism', a pro-active sense of responsibility to help build the nation's future. This focus of the past was not only evident in Mandela's rhetoric. Norval writes how members of the National Party had argued that:

all action therefore had to be future-oriented, for if South Africans dwelt on the 'real or imagined' sins of the past, they would never be able to find one another in the present (1996:280).

However, Mandela understood very well that optimistic, future-looking rhetoric alone would not eradicate the heavy burden of the past on South Africa's present. In fact, the ANC insisted that no healing could take place without bringing the crimes of the past into the light of day. The specific way in which this was done fits well into Mandela's overall reconciliatory approach. In 1995, he installed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Archbishop Tutu, to establish a truthful record of the violence committed by both the white minority government and the opposition parties.

With this decision, the choice was made to deal with the past in a restorative rather than a retributive manner. The choice was consciously made not to single out one population group as guilty of the apartheid past. Instead, crimes on all sides of the conflict were investigated and the emphasis was on healing in order to be able to move into the future together. Instead of a polarizing, retribution-oriented approach, a path of inclusion and forgiveness was chosen, positioning everyone as both victim and perpetrator. In his 1999 book, Archbishop Tutu explains the connection between this path and the concept of '*ubuntu*', which he describes as a central concept in the African worldview (Tutu 1999:34). The concept, he writes, is very difficult to render in a Western language, but it 'speaks of the essence of being human'. Its core idea is that 'a person is a person through other people'. In relation to reconciliation, Tutu writes that '*ubuntu* means in a real sense even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implemented and which they supported so enthusiastically' (Tutu 1999:35). Verdoolaege speaks of a 'reconciliation-oriented master narrative', encouraging both participants in the TRC and society at large to 'commit themselves to a reconciled and unified South Africa'

(2008:145). It should be mentioned that despite these aims, the workings and the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have not been without controversies. Many in the black community felt the white community insufficiently participated in the TRC process. A significant blow to the process was the fact that the final report was rejected both by former President De Klerk and Mandela's own ANC.<sup>23</sup>

### **International dimension of the transition**

The end of apartheid also marked the re-entry of South Africa into the international arena after decades of isolation and the renewal of international linkages. South Africa became 'a universal metaphor for the battle between fairness and injustice' (Gevisser 2009:10). The 'miracle nation' firmly acquired the image of a beacon of hope in Africa, an exceptional country that is better prepared to survive on the continent than other parts of Africa. Mandela's reconciliatory approach drew the favourable attention of the international community at a time when many transitional societies were riddled by conflict and chaos. This image was reinforced by years of economic growth and political stability, making South Africa the leading nation of Africa in the eyes of the Western powers. As South Africa opened up to the market of international tourism, South African tourism businesses strongly invested in ways of celebrating the country's cultural diversity for foreign (and domestic) audiences.<sup>24</sup>

### **Development of national identity after 1994**

The political nation-building project was mirrored in a rapid development of a new sense of transcendent, inclusive South African nationhood amongst the wider population, as demonstrated in a series of quantitative studies on national identification held since 1994 (Mattes 2002).<sup>25</sup> In their seven year survey (1994-2000) of social movements in South Africa, Klandermans, Roefs and Olivier (2001) detected a clear trend towards a stronger national identity. A few years later, the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) found similarly high percentages (Grossberg, Struwig and Pillay 2006:58). A 2004 survey by Futurefact found that 53% of South Africans used the category 'South African' as their primary identity, far ahead of racial or ethnic identities (study referred to in the report 'A Nation in the Making', Presidency, 2006). South Africans also score high on national pride in a comparative perspective (Mattes 2004, Grossberg, Struwig and Pillay 2006).

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<sup>23</sup> The ANC's main objection to the report was that it treated the apartheid regime and the liberation movement as moral equivalents (Mangcu 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Some scholars have critically observed how this development has given rise to a problematic presentation of South Africa's different cultures, perpetuating primitive stereotypes about Africa (for instance Schutte 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Quantitative surveys discussed here primarily cover the era 1994-2008, as the empirical study of this dissertation was finalized in 2008.

South African social identities have been going through a sweeping process of re-articulation post-apartheid. In addition to an increased national identity, several surveys found the growth of personalized identities and the decrease of racial identities based on the racial classification of apartheid (Klandermans, Roefs and Olivier 2001). When it comes to the development of national identity among the youth, patterns found within the youth again mirror those within the population at large (Norris et al. 2008:62). The surveys also give us some specific insights on whether unity in diversity in South Africa is a feasible project. Both Klandermans and co-authors (2001) and Grossberg and co-authors (2006) found that strong group-based identities (based on ethnicity, class, gender, generation, neighbourhood, political or religious affiliation) were compatible with an overarching national identity. Indeed, as Klandermans and co-authors state:

people who identified with a larger variety of groups were also more likely to identify with the nation [...]. It suggests that national identity presupposed subgroup identity, rather than that subgroup identity undermined national identity (2001:105).

This would suggest that Mandela's call to turn cultural diversity from an obstacle into a source of strength and pride is more than mere rhetoric. Even though each of these surveys operationalized and measured the concept of national identity in slightly differing ways, it is safe to state that in the period between 1994 and 2004 a remarkably strong sense of identification with the South African nation has indeed developed.

The picture becomes more complex when the survey data are disaggregated by race (Norris et al. 2008, Boyce 2010). All studies found significant differences in national identification depending on a respondent's racial group (Klandermans, Roefs and Olivier 2001, Gibson 2006, Norris et al. 2008). The overall pattern is that national identity has increased steadily among black South Africans, but it has clearly lagged behind or even decreased for minority groups. These patterns are mirrored in specific studies on national identity among the generation of the youth. Norris and co-authors (2008) suggest the explanation for these diverging patterns has to do with a shift in positions of dominance and non-dominance. In this view, the historical opportunity of full citizenship and enfranchisement gave a strong impulse to national identification for black South Africans, while the reverse process would apply to white South Africans (Norris et al. 2008 :63). Furthermore, scholars also found important changes in national identification over time. Interestingly, the strength of national identification seems to be influenced by political events. Klandermans and co-authors (2001) found that national identification in general increased around election time. In addition, the authors suggest that it decreased among minority groups in 1998 in response to sentiments of frustration and disappointment



about political issues. Other longitudinal studies found an even more dramatically shifting pattern in South Africans' attitudes towards the nation. Shifting from proud optimism to disaffection and alienation, South Africans' national identification is like 'a roller coaster ride' (Kuper in a Future Fact Press release, 2004).

### **Cracks in the Rainbow Image**

The miracle story of the transition to democracy, the extraordinary and universally resonant symbolic meaning of Mandela, the successful marketing of South Africa as a Rainbow Nation and the statistics on an increasing sense of national identity – all this has the risk of distracting attention from the raw and complex reality of transforming a society marked so thoroughly by racism, antagonism, division and inequality. It became obvious already under Mandela's presidency that declaring the Rainbow nation and non-racialism would not automatically create a new national social order around those same values. More specifically, the post-apartheid government was faced with the daunting task of addressing the double burden of the apartheid past – reconciling a divided people and tackling an extraordinary material inequality. Redistribution of wealth was much needed, but it potentially undermined the project of reconciliation and non-racialism. The dilemma between these two projects constituted an increasing source of contention. According to Mangcu (2003:108), the feeling developed within black political circles that the white community had not reciprocated Mandela's reconciliatory gestures, and that all they cared for was a continuation of their privileges. As long as these perceptions prevail, reconciliation and collective national identity will remain complicated. At the same time, it is precisely those measures targeted at the improvement of the economic situation of black South Africans that lie at the root of feelings of alienation and anxiety among the white population. This dilemma would become even more pronounced under the next president, Thabo Mbeki.

### **The Mbeki years: transformation and Africanism**

By the time Thabo Mbeki took over the presidency from Mandela in 1999, the fog of euphoria had cleared and the full scope of the complex process of transformation became visible. In response, Mbeki shifted the emphasis of government policy from reconciliation and unity to achieving more structural transformation and redistribution. With this change came a change in discourse. Where Mandela's discourse had been imbued with references to unity, new patriotism and reconciliation, the core themes of Mbeki's speeches were different. His approach is widely viewed as a shift to Africanism or African nationalism, which has both international and domestic dimensions that will each be discussed below. If assessed in the context of the ideologies on nationalism discussed in

Chapter Two, one would be inclined to think that Africanism builds on an exclusivist, ethnoracial nationalism, excluding those who do not exhibit the selection criterion of being 'African' from the national community. However, the literature indicates that there are two different versions of African nationalism: one that builds on an inclusive, civic ideology, and the other on an exclusive, ethnoracial ideology. Ndlovu-Gatsheni refers to the former as 'narrow, autochthonous, nativist and xenophobic forms', to be contrasted with inclusive versions of African nationalism aimed uniting people across racial and ethnic boundaries (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010:281).

While Mandela was 'wrestling to establish an African identity, Mbeki has firmly located South African identity within the broader context of the African continent' (Alden and Le Pere 2009:145). In this sense, the theme of 'place' in Mbeki's discourse on nationhood was unquestionably given an African emphasis. Important in this regard is Mbeki's famous 'I am an African' speech, delivered at the adoption of the country's new Constitution in 1996. In the speech, Mbeki metaphorically traces his own ancestry within a variety of peoples across the continent, as well as different groups within South African society, before famously declaring:

Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest the assertion, I shall claim that I am an African (Mbeki 1998:32).

Initially, Mbeki's 'I am an African' speech was hailed as a visionary message of inclusive unity, an example of inclusive, civic African nationalism (Alexander et al. 2006:41). His alternate, at times overlapping, use of the terms 'African' and 'South African' suggested that all South Africans – be they black, Asian or white – could be Africans, reminiscent of the broad inclusive use of the term Black during the anti-apartheid struggle. During the course of his presidency, however, concerns about a more exclusive, ethnoracial version of Africanism grew.

### **Repositioning South Africa on the African continent**

During his term, Mbeki indeed set out to reposition South Africa as an African country. According to commentators, Mbeki was driven by a strong motivation to counter what he saw as 'afro-pessimism' or even 'racist beliefs' about the capacity of Africans to govern themselves (Gevisser 2009:264). He strove to redefine what he believed was the dominant image of Africa as a continent of failure and stagnation (Butler 2004:209) through his project of an 'African Renaissance' (Van der Westhuizen 2008:48).

Post-apartheid South Africa acquired a dominant role in Africa, both in economic and political terms. In the post-apartheid years South African businesses benefitted from new

opportunities and became the largest source of new foreign direct investment in Africa (Daniel et al. 2003). South Africa's economic activity on the continent is not uncontroversial. Allegedly, the perception is quite widespread in the rest of Africa that South Africa is primarily driven by political and economic self-interest (Alden and Le Pere 2009). South Africa finds itself in what could be described as a 'hegemon's dilemma': it is expected to be an engine of growth for the rest of Africa but not to overshadow the rest of Africa (Adebajo, Adedejij and Landsberg 2007:104).

On the side of politics, South Africa quickly obtained a visible and prominent role both in continental politics and in international organizations (Butler 2004). Particularly notable were South Africa's peacemaking efforts in intra-African conflicts. Mbeki himself – who was of the firm belief that African problems should be solved by Africans – was very visible in this process, serving as a mediator in a host of countries including Rwanda, Burundi, Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of Congo. On the other hand, South Africa's foreign policy under Mbeki has also raised controversy, as was most evident in South Africa's handling of the crisis in neighbouring Zimbabwe. Within the course of a decade, the Zimbabwean economy fully imploded and the country fell into deep political chaos. One of the results of the crisis is the large influx of Zimbabwean economic and political migrants into South Africa. Mbeki, allegedly torn between loyalty to the leader of a fellow liberation movement and a concern for peace and human rights, chose the controversial path of 'quiet diplomacy' towards Zimbabwe. His refusal to firmly condemn Mugabe, when even fellow African leaders did, was one of the issues that greatly damaged South Africa's international reputation – the second one arguably being his denialist stance on HIV/AIDS. In addition, perceptions in other African countries have been that South Africa is not suited for the role of leader in Africa because 'it is not African enough' (Filatova 1997:53).

Thus, while rhetorically Mbeki has firmly placed South Africa's destiny within the context of Africa, the relationship with the continent remains as ambivalent as it has always been. This is in part due to the deeply entrenched idea of South African exceptionalism. Building on a sense of difference and detachment from the African continent, the exceptionalism idea directly contradicts the project of constructing a more African identity and locating South Africa firmly within Africa. The repertoire of exceptionalism holds that South Africa – thanks to its unique history – will not fall victim to the ethnic chauvinism and other problems that have riddled so many other African states (Koelbe in Chidester et al. 2003, Lazarus 2004). It goes hand in hand with ignorance about and a lack of interest in the rest of Africa. These sentiments date back to the apartheid era, when the state propagated

negative images about the rest of Africa and portrayed South Africa as a 'Western' society, 'accidentally' situated at the foot of the dark continent (Lazarus 2004:610). They have spilled over to the post-apartheid era and the black South African community (Ndebele quoted in Nuttall and Michael 2000:10). Further complexity is added by the numerous and persistent evidence of widespread hostility and prejudice targeted at black African migrants in South Africa (see the section on xenophobia below for more detail). Post-apartheid South Africa's relationship with Africa is thus centred around the core dilemma between a commitment to the rest of Africa, on the one hand, and a sense of superiority to and distance from it, on the other. The tension between exceptionalism and Africanism represents another ideological dilemma that is part of the discursive space of South African nationhood.

In the last few years, the position of South Africa in the world has also been affected by broader changes in global power relations, specifically those caused by the financial and economic crises in the United States and Europe, and the continuing economic growth of the 'new economies'.<sup>26</sup> South Africa is part of the so-called 'BRICS' group of upcoming economies (made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) that jointly coordinate their economic and other policies. This signifies a constellation of new global connections in which South Africa actively takes part. It remains to be seen how these new developments impact on South African discourses of exceptionalism, Africanism and on the meanings attributed to its ties with the 'West'.

### **Africanism on a domestic level: two nations**

On a domestic level, Africanism stands for the building of the nation on specific African values, traditions, history and culture, or 'the assertion of African hegemony in a multicultural context' (Filatova 1997:50). The emergence of Africanist tendencies in the post-apartheid context is understandable. After decades of oppression, humiliation and stigmatization of African cultures and identities, black African identity is now re-articulated as a source of pride, and a new outlook on the future. Besides, as Filatova questions: Should social and cultural life not reflect the demographic character of a country which is overwhelmingly African (Filatova 1997:53)? To date, this has certainly not been the case in South Africa, where for instance non-European sources and languages are still underrepresented in school curricula (Adam and Moodley 2000:61).

That Mbeki's presidency is associated with a rise in Africanism and a turn to more racialized discourse also has to do with a change in domestic policy priorities under his

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<sup>26</sup> As a result of the global financial crisis growth has decreased in most of the BRICS countries. In South Africa, the annual growth rate decreased from 3,8% to 2,6% in 2012 (The Economist 2012)

government. As described above, when Mbeki took office as president, the emphasis shifted from reconciliation to transformation and redistribution. As Gevisser notes: 'Mbeki felt it necessary to begin articulating the truth that reconciliation was unrealizable unless it was accompanied by the fundamental transformation of the entire socio-economic fabric of society' (2009:247). This was firstly about addressing the socio-economic inequalities carried over from the apartheid past (Ansell 2004), and secondly about changing the demographic composition of both public and private institutions (Erasmus 2005) to become more representative of the broader society. Even if, as Mangcu (2003) notes, this meant Mbeki had to burst 'the bubble of the racial honeymoon' of the Mandela era.

Mbeki had already emphasized what he saw as the racialised character of inequality during his vice-presidency, in his 1998 'two nations' speech. In the speech, Mbeki described South Africa as consisting of two nations: 'one white and prosperous and the other black and poor' (Mbeki 10.06.1997). The speech is significant for an understanding of South African discourses on nationhood, as it suggests that South Africa continues to consist of separate nations, divided by class and racial criteria. By linking race so explicitly to questions of privilege and disadvantage, the speech was perceived by many as a move away from an inclusive, non-racial version of the nation.

### **Pervasive socio-economic inequality**

On the one hand, Mbeki rightfully focused attention on South Africa's enormous socio-economic inequality. This, arguably the most pervasive problem of contemporary South African society, directly contradicts the new nation's founding value of equality. According to the GINI coefficient, the gap between rich and poor in South Africa is among the widest in the world (Jacobs and Calland 2002, Terreblanche 2002:35). It is estimated that nearly 40% of all South Africans live in poverty (Mail and Guardian 21.02.2012). In part, inequality in South Africa is a manifestation of universal social economic trends in a globalized, neo-liberal economic world order – an order that produces clear 'winners and losers' (Bentley and Habib 2008, Alexander et al. 2006). But these global trends work in conjunction with specifically South African racialised inequities inherited from the apartheid past. The extraordinary gap in living standards between the privileged and the impoverished segments of the population really amounts to two completely different worlds of experience. It is perhaps the most urgent challenge for any nation-building initiative in South Africa (Bentley and Habib 2008:11, Maré 1999).

Debatable, however, is Mbeki's suggestion of an absolute correlation between race and class, as was the case in the apartheid era. Studies have pointed out that the relationship

between class and race has changed significantly (Seekings and Natrass 2005), and is much more complex than the simplistic picture of an impoverished black and a wealthy white nation. Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has seen the quick rise of a so-called black middle and upper class who make up the richest 10 % of the black African population. Whereas 29% of the middle class was African in 1994, the corresponding figure for 2000 is around 50% (Southall 2004:527). Because of this trend, the connection between blackness and disadvantage is loosening (Seekings and Natrass 2005:5). At the same time, the poor black African masses continue to live below the poverty line and struggle for their daily means of existence. This leads Erasmus to state that 'overwhelmingly, poverty in South Africa today still has a black face' (2005). Economic inequality thus no longer exists solely between racial groups, but is growing within racial groups (Vahed and Desai 2010). These new class-based cleavages are the combined outcome of the pervasive inequality patterns inherited from the apartheid past *and* new inequalities that have resulted from the macro-economic policies of the post-apartheid governments.

### **Matters of contestation: redress and affirmative action**

The post-apartheid governments of Mandela and Mbeki have attempted to address the apartheid legacy of racialized socio-economic inequities with a package of measures aimed at redress. Apart from measures in the sphere of reconstruction and development and land restitution, these include affirmative action policies formulated in legislation on 'Black Economic Empowerment' (BEE) and employment equity (see e.g. Durrheim 2010, Bentley and Habib 2008). Affirmative action is not only about economic opportunities. It is also aimed at changing the demographic composition of both public and private institutions to make them more reflective of the population – a value so profoundly violated under apartheid (Erasmus 2005:19). Debates about the changing composition of national sports teams are as much part of the question of redress as are labour market issues (see also Chapter Six on the debates surrounding affirmative action in sports).

Redress in general and affirmative action in particular has proven to be a particularly controversial, conflict-generating theme (see e.g. Durrheim 2010). First, there is a debate about the impact of redress strategies when they are embedded in a broader neoliberal framework. Critics argue that affirmative action has merely benefitted the elite within the black community, and it thereby does not alter but instead amplifies inequality (Bentley and Habib 2008). Secondly, they argue that redress in the current form goes against the non-racial values of post-apartheid South Africa and the aim of building a united, single nation. The measures are said to perpetuate the resented racial categories of the past

(Alexander 2003) or, more extremely, reintroduce race policies, privilege race over merit and promote reverse racism (Durrheim 2010:31). In combination with a rhetorical emphasis on Africanism, this might fuel sentiments of threat and alienation amongst non-African communities, who are shown be overwhelmingly opposed to the measures (Durrheim 2010:40).<sup>27</sup> Among critics, calls are made to change the emphasis of the measures from racial to class disadvantage (Bentley and Habib 2008, Durrheim 2010).

### **Feelings of exclusion: 'I am an African but you are not'**

During the course of Mbeki's presidency, Mbeki's Africanism became increasingly seen as a narrower, racially exclusive vision on the nation (Chipkin 2007, Mangcu 2001, Hadland 2007). This more exclusive Africanism is seen by some as 'a move to define national identity as something associated with blackness' (Alexander et al. 2003:42), as drawing the boundaries of the nation in a racially exclusive manner, making skin colour a criterion for belonging and autochthony. As a result, some in the white, coloureds and Indian community feel that they are being excluded from the new national identity. As Hadland (2007) writes: 'Both identity and race are now being used to determine who is 'in', who is 'authentic' and who is being spoken to by the country's leadership'. He goes on to write: 'I am an African no longer means we are all African. It means I am an African, and you are not' (Hadland 2007, Alexander et al. 2006:25).

In part, sentiments such as these are fed by redress policies as described above. What amplifies them is the resurgence of 'racialized' language both in political and broader public debates (Mangcu 2001). Erasmus argues that the Mbeki government used race as a defence against criticism:

[...] President Mbeki works with race in a way that suggests anyone who holds views alternative to and critical of the government, by implication, holds Eurocentric racist views of black Africans (2005:27).

The Mbeki era has seen a series of conflicts or scandals with strong racial overtones (for instance the Makgoba affair or the 'Reitz incident' at the University of the Free State<sup>28</sup>). The emergence of exclusively black professional organisations is seen as exemplary of a new racial assertiveness (Adam and Moodley 2000, Ansell 2004). The already mentioned debates about the composition of sports teams have added to the controversy.

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<sup>27</sup> Remarkably, opposition to affirmative action is also significant in the Indian and Coloured communities, despite the fact that members of these communities are also beneficiaries of the employment equity legislation (Durrheim 2010:41).

<sup>28</sup> Makgoba was a vice-chancellor at WITS University who got caught up in a 'question of administrative discipline [that] was turned into an intellectual witch-hunt, with strong racist undertones' (Mamdani 1997, Mangcu 2003). The 2008 Reitz incident was about a – widely interpreted as racist videotape in which white students involved black workers in humiliating acts against a background of the struggle to desegregate university residences (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7267027.stm>).

Paradoxically, the introduction of inclusive citizenship in South Africa has resulted in a sense of disenfranchisement among parts of the white community, who 'are struggling to find a place for themselves in an increasingly Africanised South Africa' (Distiller and Steyn 2004:9). Dolby (2001:5) has written powerfully about 'white fright', a sense of threat and fear that she sees as a key marker for white youth identity, in which affirmative action plays an important role. Sentiments of exclusion are symbolized by real-life barriers, as the increasing trend of gated communities poignantly demonstrates (Ballard 2004). Emigration could be regarded as another manifestation of a diminishing sense of belonging. Among Indian and Coloured communities, similar sentiments can be detected but here history added another layer of complexity. In the section above I already described the ambivalent position of these communities in both the apartheid and post-apartheid society. Speaking of the 'Coloured' community, Farred writes that:

[the coloured] community is in the nation but not of it, a crucial part of the anti-apartheid history but not enough to it to take equal place with blacks as post-apartheid citizens (2003:182).

In the same vein, Valed and Desai (2010) suggest that working-class Indians feel threatened and marginalized in the new South Africa. They argue that this was the reason why many among them (and among the working-class coloured community) voted for parties other than the ANC in consecutive elections – the much analysed instance of the 'minority vote' (2010:3).

As with the white community, feelings of alienation are based on a combination of resentment against affirmative action as well as a number of specific incidents (such as the affair around the song 'amaNdiya' referred to above, Njamnyoh 2006). The risk is that these types of sentiments backlash in the form of a withdrawal into the more narrowly defined ethnic community. These sentiments are important in relation to the current study because they indicate a perceived gap between the nation-building project and everyday experiences.

### **Feelings of exclusion: the plight of the poor**

The second group at risk of developing feelings of alienation from the new national community are the poor. These are the impoverished masses, the South African 'underclass', the have-nots, who are not exclusively but still overwhelmingly black African. They live at the margins of society in informal urban settlements or rural areas, in circumstances of dire poverty, violence and disease, particularly HIV/AIDS (Bekker and Leilde 2003). They are dependent on an informal, third-world economy fraught by unemployment and are unable to survive in the formal, globalized, competitive liberal economy. The post-apartheid governments have undeniably taken steps to improve the



living standards in these impoverished areas, starting with the most basic needs of water and electricity. But for many residents these steps are too little and too late. Amongst them, there are many who have invested in the liberation struggle and understandably had significant expectations of a new dispensation and an ANC-led government. It is in this light not surprising that the lack of improvement of material circumstances is a source of a growing sense of frustration with and lack of commitment to the new dispensation amongst poor masses. While these masses long remained silent, the last years of Mbeki's regime – between 2006 and 2008 – saw a wave of protest actions across the country, almost exclusively about a lack of service delivery (Hemson 2010:107). A connection is also often made between this growing discontent and the May 2008 xenophobic attacks (see Chapter Six). This is a clear indicator of a growing sense of disappointment and exclusion amongst a significant group in society – and a real challenge to the development of social cohesion and a collective national identity.

### **The power struggle between Mbeki and Zuma**

While the transition from Mandela to Mbeki might have marked 'the end of the racial honeymoon', Mbeki's second term would come to mark the end of consensus and unity within the liberation movement. The key act in this latter drama was the power struggle between Thabo Mbeki and the current President Jacob Zuma, a struggle that would reach a boiling point at the ANC Conference in Polokwane in 2007. The saga began in 2005 when Mbeki recalled his then-deputy minister Jacob Zuma and long-time struggle companion from his state office after the latter was accused by the National Prosecuting Authority of being involved in corruption.<sup>29</sup> Zuma, however, could count on a significant support base both within the ANC and with the ANC's left-wing political allies (the SACP and Cosatu), who contested his dismissal from the beginning. The event led to the gradual split of the historically highly cohesive ANC into two camps. Polarization between the two camps reached a climax at the 2007 Conference of the African National Congress in Polokwane, where the ANC chose Zuma as its party leader over Thabo Mbeki. This resulted in Mbeki remaining state president without the confidence of the majority of his own party (Southall 2009:317). In September 2008, the Zuma camp triumphed again when a Pietermaritzburg High Court Judge decided that the decision to prosecute Zuma for corruption was politically motivated.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, pressure rose on Mbeki and he was recalled from office by the ANC. Kgalema Motlante became interim president until the elections planned for 2009. At these elections, Jacob Zuma was elected to become South Africa's third post-apartheid president. Mbeki loyalists, disgruntled with his

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<sup>29</sup> Jacob Zuma was accused of having 'a corrupt relationship' with businessman Shabir Shaik.

<sup>30</sup> A judgement that would later be repealed, but only after the political downfall of Mbeki.

dismissal from the presidency in 2008, united with a host of other Zuma opponents to organize a new political party, The Congress of the People (COPE) – which participated in the 2009 elections. This was arguably the first serious African-based opposition to emerge in a political landscape until then entirely dominated by the ANC (Piper 2009). This series of spectacular political events triggered a lot of self-reflection among South African analysts and commentators. While they agree that Zuma's ascent signifies a 'watershed' moment, they disagree on the kinds of changes it will bring about, and whether it gives reason for optimism or pessimism (Piper 2009).

In hindsight, Zuma's ascent to power could have been foreseen in the tensions that built up during the Mbeki presidency: tensions that were a combined result of Mbeki's particular policies, his persona and political discourse, and more general developments such as the impact of globalized capitalism and the inevitable dying down of the 'Madiba Magic moment'. During the power struggle, Jacob Zuma became a symbol for everything Thabo Mbeki was not. Where Mbeki represented modernity, intellectualism, neo-liberalism, centralism, elitism and technocracy, Zuma became a symbol of charisma, grassroots democracy, the uneducated masses, traditionalism, patriarchy and ethnicity. It is difficult to grasp the symbolism of Jacob Zuma in a consistent list of values precisely because his strength is that he can appeal to very diverse constituencies: a true chameleon (Southall 2009:325). A strong personality cult swiftly developed around Zuma. His persona became a focal point of identification and hope for different groups that had begun to feel excluded and marginalized during the Mbeki presidency. His support base has been labelled 'the coalition of the aggrieved', including not only the poor African masses with their unmet expectations but also for instance Afrikaners and poor whites (Southall 2009). Zuma is also associated with a strong expression of ethnic Zulu identity, as underscored by his own keen celebration of his Zulu heritage and that of his supporters, who were often spotted with t-shirts saying '100% Zuluboy'. Fears that this would bring narrow ethnicism into South African policies, however, seem to be unfounded, as Zuma's support base has always cut across ethnic categories (Gevisser 2009:326). Even though Zuma was the ultimate everyman, he was in no way an uncontroversial figure with 'saint-like' qualities like Mandela. By contrast, as Southall (2009:331) writes: 'Zuma provokes astonishing levels of discomfort amongst his detractors'. This became manifest for example when he stated that 'of all the white groups that are in South Africa, only the Afrikaners are truly South Africans in the true sense of the word' (Mail and Guardian, 03.04.2009). Opposition parties immediately condemned Zuma's 'ethnically and racially blinkered world view' (Democratic Alliance, 02.04.2009). Among his detractors, Zuma is seen as a populist, and posing a threat to the

democratic values and the judicial system of the country. His association with corruption affairs, a highly controversial rape trial (for which he was acquitted) and his publicly flaunted polygamy are seen as stains on the country's international reputation.

It is beyond the scope of the present study to address the question of whether and how the dominant discourse on South African nationhood has shifted under the Zuma Presidency. Zuma became President of the Republic in 2009, and his presidential rhetoric has not been included in the review that forms the basis of the current chapter. This said, it is important to reflect on some of the themes that Zuma represented. Zuma was already a central actor on the political stage during the 2007 and 2008 focus groups, and the themes he represented were already part of the discursive space of that moment. Particularly in 2008, the power struggle between Mbeki and Zuma formed a central element of the political background against which the series of focus groups took place. Moreover, the struggle between the two politicians can be seen as symbolic for some of the contradictions and tensions inherent in the post-apartheid situation. In it, we can identify conflicting images of South Africa, shifting boundaries of in- and exclusion and some of the key ideological dilemmas that are at the heart of the new South Africa.

## **Closing remarks**

The aim of this chapter has been to map out the broader socio-historical context in which collective discourses or repertoires about South African nationhood are embedded, as well as examine the most important ones among these in detail. The chapter has described how the discourse on South African nationhood has developed historically from the apartheid era until the final stages of the second Mbeki government in 2008. What has become very clear in this overview is how South African nationhood has continuously been subject to redefinition and the boundaries of in- and exclusion have been drawn and redrawn across time. We also saw that different ideological perspectives on nationhood have served to inform these various discourses, ranging from white supremacist ethnoracial nationalism via multicultural nationalism to new forms of African nationalism. These different discourses have not emerged in isolation, but always stood in a complex relation to socio-political or economic circumstances of the era. In line with a critical discursive approach, I argue that the discourses helped to constitute particular social realities as much as they were simultaneously products of these realities. What also became clear in the chapter is that the discursive space of South African nationhood is marked by a number of central ideological dilemmas, resulting in part from the country's complex history.

The extensive discussion of these discourses, the contexts in which they were articulated and the ideological dilemmas that ran through them, is an important step in my study. As I suggested in Chapter Two, to understand how the national community is imagined on a daily basis by individual members, we need to begin by examining the collective processes of meaning-making on the nation. One important element within these collective processes are political discourses on nationhood. In the case of South Africa, where nation-building became a *number one* political priority after the transition from apartheid, these political discourses have been highly visible and prominent. My expectation was that they would constitute an important resource for national identity talk of ordinary people. The analysis in Chapters Five and Six will demonstrate that that is indeed the case. This said, it is important to stress that political repertoires form just one of many potential collective resources for people to draw from in their talk. Another important resource, it was argued in Chapter Two, are newsworthy, large scale events. In Chapter Six I will focus specifically on the ways in which two such events are refracted in national identity talk.



## Chapter 4: Methodology

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### **Critical discursive psychology**

Similar to other micro-level approaches to discourse analysis, critical discursive psychology builds on the premise that the construction of identity is located in the concrete, observable interactions of people in conversation. It is these interactions that form the main site for empirical analysis. The critical discursive psychology approach has important implications for the ways in which interviews should be analyzed. In this view, interviews should not be treated as instruments for collecting information about participant's thoughts and attitudes, but as instances of talk-in-interaction, or in the words of Wetherell: 'complex cultural and psychological products, constructed in ways which make things happen and which bring social worlds into being' (2001b:16).

Just like other micro-level approaches to discourse analysis -such as conversation analysis and ethno-methodology- critical discursive psychology builds on the assumption that talk on identities is an activity, taking place at a particular moment, in a particular interaction. At the same time, critical discursive psychology argues that people build their accounts out of a variety of pre-existing resources: resources that exist beyond the scope of the immediate conversation at hand. Even though interviews are 'highly situated practices', routine, repetitive, consensual, cultural or normative resources are brought into the discourse (Wetherell and Potter 1992:9). In this respect there is a clear parallel with the combined collective and idiosyncratic processes involved in expressions of national identity described in Chapter Two. In that chapter, I emphasized that when talking about the nation, people may be drawing on collective repertoires, but these repertoires are always appropriated and remade in idiosyncratic ways within a specific, local conversational context.

Critical discursive psychology thus argues for an empirical, talk-based analysis that does take into consideration resources or repertoires that are available in a culture. In the words of Antaki:

It [critical discursive psychology] is aware that some meaningful work is achieved in the local organization of talk, but reaches up to bring in culturally charged content: themes, repertoires and other chunks of talk, not necessarily all in the same spot of the transcript and not all spoken by the same person (1994:120).

This twofold approach is what Wetherell argues for in her plea for a ‘synthetic approach’ within discourse analysis (1998). Through a combined analysis of both thematic content and the local, conversational interaction we should attempt to answer what Wetherell posits as the key question: ‘why this utterance here’ (1998: 388)? Why would this particular person forward this version of identity in this particular place, at this particular moment? What are the possibilities and limitations of this particular conversational setting? At the same time, the analyst must be able to ‘read’ the context: to look beyond the phenomena offered by the text, and draw upon social phenomena broader than the text (Wetherell in Van den Berg et al. 2003:21). Wodak et al. (2009) equally argue for such a combined approach. In their study on the construction of Austrian national identity they ‘try to integrate as much as available information on the historical background and original historical sources in which discursive events are ‘embedded’ (2009:8).

I will adopt a similar approach in this study. As we have seen in Chapter Two, national identity is one of those large categorical identities that is dependent on culturally available meanings and systems of cultural representation. Those meanings are not invented from scratch each time, by each individual, but are collectively available ‘at the supply side of culture’ (Lamont 1995: 352). They are embedded in complex socio-historical processes. At the same time, the reproduction of these collective resources in concrete instances of talk is highly situational, idiosyncratic and variable across time. The critical discursive psychology approach posited by Wetherell (1998) and Edley (2001) is able to capture precisely that double-sided dimension. My methodological approach builds on two concepts that are presented as key concepts in critical discursive psychology by Edley (2001): *interpretative repertoires* and *ideological dilemmas*. To this I add a third important concept, inspired by the work of Reicher and Hopkins (2001): the *action-orientation of identity talk*.

### **Interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas**

Two concepts are specifically useful for the analysis of ‘culturally charged content’, the collective resources that people are drawing from in their talk. These are the concepts of *interpretative repertoires* and *ideological dilemmas*.<sup>31</sup> The first concept, interpretative repertoires, is the term Wetherell and Potter (1992) use to refer to the ‘routine, repetitive, consensual, cultural or normative resources’ that exist ‘beyond the immediate conversation at hand’ (Wetherell and Potter 1992:9). Edley (2001) describes these as ‘relatively coherent ways of talking about objects and events in the world’ (2001:198).

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<sup>31</sup> These two concepts are part of the three concepts forwarded by Edley in his 2001 outline of the key concepts in critical discursive psychology (2001:189); the third is ‘subject positions’.

These repertoires are seen as belonging to and available in a community, and they provide that community with a basis for a shared sense of social understanding (Edley 2001:198). They have become part of a community's common sense, and are often taken for granted. Edley uses the illustrative metaphor of these resources as books on the shelves of a public library, permanently available for borrowing and use in conversations (Edley 2001:198). Although they use different terms, Wodak et al. describe something similar when they write about the intertextual and interdiscursive leads that feed into (semi-) private discourse. As they point out, this covers for instance formulations of politicians or the media that are taken up and reproduced by participants in a conversation (Wodak 1999:10).

There are similarities between interpretative repertoires and what in poststructuralist discourse analysis is called culturally available 'discourses'. But as Wetherell and Potter (1992:87) argue, the notion of interpretative repertoires is more adjusted to the analysis of talk as social practice. Within socio-psychological literature, there is some debate about the degree to which individual speakers can access and draw from various interpretative repertoires in order to position themselves in particular ways (see e.g. Condor 2000).<sup>32</sup> In my understanding of interpretative repertoires, the emphasis is indeed on the flexible use of repertoires and the agency of the speaker to pick, choose and blend those elements together so as to produce a version that best fits the demands of a particular conversational context and audience. As Edley writes: 'Conversations are usually made up of a patchwork of "quotations" from various interpretative repertoires' (Edley 2001:198). This suggestion of flexible and active use of repertoires by speakers is precisely the insight we need to make the connection between the levels of collective meaning-making and that of situated, idiosyncratic meaning-making that is so central to the theoretical approach in this study. In the next section I will come back to that situated level in more detail.

What type of analysis is needed to identify, examine and assess interpretative repertoires in talk or text? Wetherell (in Van den Berg et al. 2003:21) emphasizes that this analysis goes beyond the searching, coding and counting of sets of words that commonly make up quantitative content analyses. Instead, utterances must always be analyzed within their

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<sup>32</sup> In a critique on Wetherell and Potter's 1992 work on racist discourse among Pakeha New Zealanders, Condor (2000) argues that in this particular text the authors present a too rigid distinction between 'racist' and anti-racist discourse and imply that certain speakers only have access to particular (in this case racist) discourses, while other people have access to 'essentially different ideological and discursive resources and are in a position to reinforce anti-racist ideologies' (Condor 2000:197). This would imply that the macro social functions of discourse are determined by the objective social structural position of the speaker, and contradict the idea that speakers have agency to pick and choose from different available repertoires.



broader socio-historical context. We must therefore begin by mapping out that socio-historical context before examining specific stretches of talk or text (1992:9). With that knowledge of the context in mind the analyst must then attempt to identify, across a large corpus of interview data, repetitions of ‘culturally recognized’ patterns of talk; these indicate the reproduction of interpretative repertoires (1992:9). Special attention should be given to variations within these patterns of talk. In the critical discursive psychology approach, variations and contradictions are not seen as a complication but instead as grist to the mill of the researcher. Critical discursive psychologists do not expect talk, including the interpretative repertoires used in talk, to be consistent and unified. The cultural and ideological resources – or the interpretative repertoires – people have available for making sense of the world are multiple and dilemmatic.

This is where the concept of ideological dilemmas (Billig et al. 1988) fits in. This refers to the contrary, dilemmatic themes within both formal ideologies and commonsensical knowledge in societies. As Billig and co-authors argue, dilemmas form the foundation of thought. They provide the material for people to ‘puzzle over their everyday lives’, both internally – by thinking – and externally – by arguing and debating. Following this idea, both people’s thinking and their conversations will reflect these contrary themes and will thus not be consistent, systematized and unified.<sup>33</sup>

Human understanding always occurs in a context of argument, of dialogue in which different positions are pitted against each other (Billig quoted in Wetherell and Potter 1992:96).

In a similar vein, Gamson (1992) writes about ‘themes’ and ‘counter-themes’ (Gamson 1992:11). In my view, it is useful to bring the notions of interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas together in an integrated approach to identity talk.<sup>34</sup>

The collective, interpretative repertoires that people draw from in identity talk are bound to contain their own internal contradictions. In the context of nationalism, an example is the ambivalence between ethnocultural and civic notions within repertoires about nationhood, as was described in Chapter Two. Billig’s argument has consequences for our

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<sup>33</sup> The ideological dilemmas approach implies a very different understanding of processes of thinking from that underpinning traditional social psychological approaches, that ‘see internal disharmony as uncomfortable’ (Billig 1988:20).

<sup>34</sup> This relates to another point Condor (2000) raises when discussing Wetherell and Potter’s conceptualisation of ‘interpretative repertoires’. Condor’s argument seems to be that Wetherell and Potter present racist and anti-racist discourses as two distinct, clearly bounded, internally coherent ideologies that are each available (through different interpretative repertoires) to distinct groups of speakers. They thereby ignore the existence of contradictory themes or dilemmas *within* ideologies. As Condor (2000:197) writes: ‘The ideological dilemmas-approach, by contrast, adopts an in-principle position to the effect that the co-existence of themes within accounts should be read as evidence for the existence of a fundamental dilemma existing *within* common sense ideologies’ (my emphasis).

understanding of interview talk. People's talk will reflect the contrary themes inherent in ideological and commonsensical resources, or shared interpretative repertoires. In her study on English national identity talk, Condor writes: 'The existence of contrary themes within accounts should be read as evidence for the existence of a fundamental dilemma existing within commonsense ideologies' (Condor 2000:197). Informed by ideas from rhetorical theory, Billig suggests that the versions people construct are always 'designed to counter real or potential alternatives' (Billig quoted in Wetherell and Potter 1992). In some instances, a contradiction or conflict between different versions manifests itself explicitly in interview talk. In other cases, however, contradictions may remain implicit. One-sided claims may always have opposite meanings, and may always represent one side in an argument, even if the counter-argument remains under the surface. In that case, we can only assess those implicit counter-themes by analyzing utterances against the background of the broader socio-historical context.

Contrary themes, variations and inconsistencies in people's account are of crucial importance, because they 'tell us that there is some important work going on' (Antaki 1994:124). In the words of Wetherell and Potter they 'signal that different ways of constructing events, processes or groups are being deployed to achieve different effects' (1992:101). They signal the ways in which collective, interpretative repertoires and the contrary themes within them are drawn upon, reproduced, altered or ignored by speakers for the purpose of accomplishing something within a situated conversational context. It is in these variations and inconsistencies that identity talk manifests itself most clearly as a social practice, an action upon the world, a means to promote a particular version of that social world. Patterns of variation, Wetherell and Potter argue, help 'to reveal the different ways in which discourse is orientated to action' (1992:101).

### **Action-orientation: identity talk as an action upon the world**

We have seen in Chapter Two that an important function of identity claims is that they express a vision of the social order, the groups within that social order and the relationship between people. The third concept in my methodological approach is the action-orientation of identity talk. Through their identity claims, people can position themselves and others, both in immediate interactions and in the broader social world (Chrysoschoou 2003:236, Reicher and Hopkins 2001, Reicher 2004). Important in this perspective is the future-orientation of identity claims: what is being forwarded is often a version of the social world that is being aspired to rather than a description of the current states of affairs.

The notion of identity talk as an action upon the world helps us to analyze why speakers are drawing from certain interpretative repertoires in a given context and not from others, why they are including some resources and omitting others, and why their accounts are variable or even inconsistent across different settings and across time. In this view, people's inconsistent and possibly contradictory accounts become thoughtful, intelligent strategies for tuning an account to a specific context at hand. Relevant questions become: what might be at stake for this speaker to forward this particular claim in this context? Concrete interests of the speaker might be at stake, for instance, claiming to belong to a particular group. The interesting question for analysis, in this perspective, is why a person would put forward a particular version of the identity in a particular context, or, again: 'why this utterance here'? What is this version accomplishing in this specific context? And how do the features of the context impact on the possible versions of the identity? To pose the question as Billig might, which real or potential alternative versions are being countered here, and why? (Billig quoted in Wetherell and Potter 1992: 96). This involves analyzing the 'action-orientation' that may drive particular constructions of identity. To analyze this action-orientation, we need to examine several levels of the context of utterances. The first is the immediate conversational context: what was said before this utterance, by whom, and what was the general tone of the conversation? An utterance should never be assessed on its own, but always as part of a conversational interaction, in which not only interviewees but the interviewer also participates.

The second is what Wodak and co-authors have termed the 'extra-linguistic social variables and institutional settings of the specific situation of an utterance' (2009:10). This is about concrete characteristics of the setting of a conversation: the location, the audience, the degree of formality, the social relations between participants in a conversation and so on. This second level of context is also about the sociological characteristics of speakers, or the intersecting identity categories that might inform the particular speaker involved. As argued in Chapter Two, within a discursive approach, these intersecting categories should be seen as multiple discourses that people participate in.

The impact of the audience on an identity claim is particularly important, as was already suggested in Chapter Two. There are always different levels of audience involved. In a context such as a focus group, there is obviously an immediate audience: that of the other participants and the interviewer. But as was argued in Chapter Two, there are also indirect, 'virtual' audiences that speakers may take into account when constructing a

particular utterance at a particular moment. For instance, in her study of conversations on English national identity, Condor found speakers addressing a non-present, imaginary international audience, 'positioning foreigners either as co-conversationalists or as ratified overhearers' (Condor 2010:45). The impact of an audience goes in two directions: firstly, a particular audience may prompt a speaker to promote a particular version of the social world specifically to convince, persuade, align himself or otherwise accomplish something with that particular audience. At the same time, the (direct or indirect) presence of a particular audience might restrict the possibilities of constructing certain versions.

The third and final level of context is that level of the collective, culturally charged content discussed above. This is the level of the interpretative repertoires that exist beyond the immediate conversation, and that might have a degree of stability across larger patterns of talk and across time. Nevertheless, as was emphasized repeatedly above, the ways in which these collective repertoires are reproduced is always variable, situated and idiosyncratic. This is precisely why we need an analysis of interview material that simultaneously focuses on all three levels of context. To arrive at a comprehensive assessment of the workings of identity claims, we need to combine our analysis of interpretative repertoires with an analysis of the immediate conversational and extra-linguistic context of those claims.

### **Variations across time: applying an eventful perspective**

In Chapter Two, the argument was made for an eventful perspective on processes of national identification in talk in order to do justice to the constantly dynamic and temporal variability of processes of imagining the national community. In terms of methodology, this perspective calls for a research design that is able to assess variations in identity talk across time, against the backdrop of significant, short-term events at the social or political level. In concrete terms, it means collecting interview material at two distinct moments in time, just after a significant event has occurred. This will be described in more detail below.

The interesting aspect of significant events is that they impact directly on all three levels of the context. First of all, they may impact on the level of the collective, culturally charged resources. The events themselves and the ways in which they are represented at the level of politics, the media and so on, directly contribute to the discursive resources that speakers have available 'for telling their patch about the world' (Wetherell in Van den Berg et al. 2003:13). What we will see is that these resources are refracted through the light of these events. They shed a different light on the available resources. Secondly,

faced with these events, speakers need to incorporate them into their own situated reproductions of the identity category in their talk. Here, it is crucial to recognize that the event itself will be described and drawn upon in multiple, potentially contradictory ways. These variations can only be examined by taking the first two levels of context into account. Importantly, then, events can be approached in similar ways as interpretative repertoires: they are collectively available beyond the immediate conversational context, they are constituted in multiple ways by people talking about them, and these multiple ways are driven by an action orientation. Which versions of an event are forwarded is related to the action, the function that those versions are accomplishing in that particular context. The key difference between events and 'other' interpretative repertoires is that they have no degree of stability across time; instead, they suddenly confront the speaker with a new, and perhaps unexpected, set of discursive resources.

## **Empirical study in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal**

In the second part of this chapter, I will present the main details of the empirical study: the geographical setting of the study in the town of Pietermaritzburg (municipality of Msunduzi), the sampling and data collection procedures, the composition of each focus group and the timing of the two phases of data collection. As already noted in the introduction, the focus groups were held on the premises of secondary schools. In this chapter, I will say a few words about secondary schools from a historical perspective. I will pause for a moment to note the specific impact of the transition from apartheid to democracy on South African schools and touch on the question of high school (de)segregation. Subsequently, I will discuss the thematic focus of the interviews, the themes of the interview guide that loosely structured the conversations and the ways in which the interviews were transcribed and coded. In the last section of this chapter, I will outline the steps taken in the analysis of the interview transcripts. These steps were directly structured along the lines of the discursive psychological approach presented at the start of the chapter.

### **Focus-group method**

If language is constitutive of identities, the focus of a study on the construction of national identity should be on talk, on the language used to talk about that identity. This is why the empirical basis of this study is formed by focus-group interviews with ordinary South Africans. Qualitative, semi-structured focus-group interviews form the core of my empirical research. I chose focus-group discussions as the main method of data collection because, more than bilateral interviews, they are able to capture the process of meaning-making in talk-in-interaction. Focus groups generate data on the collective construction of

meanings of themes, identities and events. But they also provide rich information on ‘the processes of interaction, negotiation and affirmation through which an identity is produced and sustained within a group’ (Munday 2006:90). According to Gamson:

the greatest advantage of the focus-group method is that it allows us to observe the process of people constructing and negotiating shared meaning, using their natural vocabulary (1992:17).<sup>35</sup>

My expectation was that talk on the rather abstract topic of national identity would more easily be triggered by a lively discussion among peers than by individual interviews. It is important to emphasize that focus groups are pieces of social interaction in their own right that need to be analyzed accordingly (Hollander 2004:613), a point that will be extensively addressed in the final section of this chapter under ‘ethical considerations’.

### **The ‘born free’ generation within the everyday context of the school**

The empirical core of this study consists of two series of focus groups (20 in total) with adolescent South Africans of, on average, sixteen to seventeen years old, who are living in the Msunduzi municipality. The reason for choosing this particular age group is because, as stated in the introduction of this dissertation, one of my main interests is to find out how members of the post-apartheid generation are making sense of their national identity. In one of the few other qualitative studies of the construction of national identity among South Africans across all race groups, adult South Africans were persistently referring to the younger generation as the generation that would ‘live out’ the promise of South Africa’s transition to democracy (Eaton 2006). This finding motivated me to focus my project specifically on the identity talk of those young people, and examine their position within and towards the ‘new’ South Africa in their own terms.

To create a sample of respondents from this age group, I decided to use the institutional context of secondary schools in Pietermaritzburg. Schools occupy a central place in young people’s everyday lives and they are an important site for the development of social relations, the construction of meanings and the constitution of identities. During the apartheid regime in South Africa, any racial mixing in schools was forbidden by law. Schools were organized along the lines of South Africa’s racial classification system. Schools were thus exclusively white, Indian, ‘Coloured’ or black, and located in segregated neighbourhoods (Soudien 2004:98).<sup>36</sup> The amount of resources for schooling varied

<sup>35</sup> Note that in Gamson’s own study there was no moderator present, so the participants were more concretely ‘having a conversation amongst themselves’ (Gamson 1992).

<sup>36</sup> The schooling system in apartheid times distinguished between so-called HoA (exclusively white), HoR (exclusively ‘coloured’), House of Delegates-HoD (exclusively Indian) and DET (exclusively black African) schools (Soudien 2004:98).

tremendously per population group, with most white schools being very well resourced and most black schools being impoverished. Sujee (2004:28) emphasizes that 'by being racially defined, schools played a major role in constructing and maintaining racialized social identities'. The South African Schools Act of 1996 formally terminated racial segregation in schools, but a process of desegregation had already started in the years before that. In 1990, white schools were first allowed to enrol black students legally. Children of all population groups are now allowed to attend any school they want. In practice, however, desegregation is a complex process. Both the spatial legacy of apartheid – with its persistent residential segregation and economic inequality – remain strong obstacles to full transformation of schools. The better quality schools with most resources are still disproportionately located in previously white, affluent neighbourhoods. As Jansen writes:

White schools [...] built on decades of advantage [...] have accumulated resources and built internal capacities that give white children a decisive head start in the academic race (2009:37).

Because of the funding system that allows for schools to raise differential fees, these schools are often much more expensive to attend than formerly black schools. There are also still vast inequities between formerly white and formerly Indian schools (Dolby 1999: 294). Non-white parents who can afford to do so, will bring their children to the better quality schools, as Selod and Zenou (2003:352) state:

In spite of long and costly commuting distances, the gap in school quality between former 'black' and former 'white' schools is such that there exist very strong incentives for black parents to send their children to better-resourced white schools if they can afford it.

Consequently, there has been a fairly large movement of black African children into formerly Coloured, Indian and white schools (Soudien 2004:99). Some speak of a knock-on effect, with black children moving into formerly Indian or Coloured schools, Indians and Coloureds moving into formerly white schools, and whites moving into more exclusive and expensive public or private schools (Sujee 2004:35). At the same time, the high tuition fees of white schools in practice serve to keep poor black children out. In his work on the white Afrikaner community, Jansen suggests that language is another reason why many white Afrikaner schools fail to desegregate. In his words, all-white schools have become 'a political space to which whites hold on to defend race, culture and language' (Jansen 2009:37). Jansen suggests that in many of these cases, the right to language protection and mother tongue instruction is being deployed as 'a respectable way of keeping out black people without the burden of having to make nasty racial arguments' (Jansen 2009:36). The result is that several urban schools remain all-white in terms of

both students and teachers. However, these schools are faced with increasing political pressure to transform. On the other hand, schools that have historically been disadvantaged and are located in townships will almost certainly remain 100% black (Soudien 2004:101). These schools have very little to no capacity to raise additional fees from parents.

### **Geographical setting: Pietermaritzburg in the Msunduzi municipality**

The schools where the study was conducted are located in the municipality of Msunduzi, which has Pietermaritzburg, the capital city of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, as its centre. Pietermaritzburg is the second largest city in the province (after Durban). The broader municipality of Msunduzi has 553,223 inhabitants (Statistics South Africa KZN Provincial Profile 2004). The demographics of Msunduzi are representative of the wider province of KwaZulu-Natal. The municipality has a predominantly black African, isiZulu-speaking population (around 80%, Piper 2010:3) and significant Indian South African (12%, *ibid*) and white (8%, *ibid*) minorities. Historically, the province of 'Natal' is predominantly English-speaking, and a larger percentage of whites are English-speaking rather than Afrikaans, respectively 13.6% versus 1.5% (Statistics South Africa 2001:21). Nation-wide, this picture is reversed with 13.3% of the population speaking Afrikaans as home language and 8.2 % English. The so called 'coloured' community is small, consisting of around 3% of the total population (*ibid*). As Piper demonstrates, the demographics of the city underwent significant changes since the end of apartheid, with the number of black African residents increasing and the Indian and white populations declining (Piper 2010:3). The province of KwaZulu-Natal has relatively few inhabitants that were born outside of South Africa, only 1% of the population (compared to 2.3% for South Africa as a whole, and 5.4% for the province of Gauteng (around Johannesburg, Statistics South Africa 2001).

Msunduzi is a municipality with a relatively large percentage of lower-level incomes, although the provincial capital status awarded in 2003 has triggered economic growth (Piper 2010:6). Similar to other South African cities (see Christopher 2001), the legacy of apartheid remains visible in racially segregated residential patterns. Historically white, Indian or black African neighbourhoods are today still predominantly white, Indian or black, although there is some evidence of the desegregation of historically white areas as a result of the upward mobility of members of the new black middle classes (Piper 2010:14). The pattern of racial segregation reflects a socio-economic hierarchy, with historically white areas having the highest household incomes, historically black areas the lowest and historically Indian areas falling in between (Piper 2010:14). The schools at



which I conducted the focus-group interviews were based in various neighbourhoods. Three were located in the urban centre, with learners commuting to the schools from various neighbourhoods in the municipality. One school was located in a lower working-class, historically Indian suburb. The fifth school was located in what was historically a township for black Africans, and today still is an impoverished neighbourhood which is geographically distant from the city centre.

Politically, Msunduzi still bears the scars of the period of violent struggle between supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party/IFP that raged between 1983 and 1996 (Piper 2010:7).<sup>37</sup> Pietermaritzburg is also the town that in 2006 became the central stage for the saga of the judicial court cases against Jacob Zuma. It was at the Pietermaritzburg Provincial High Court buildings that the corruption case against Zuma came up for trial and hundreds of Zuma supporters gathered around the court buildings on trial days.

### **Selection of the schools and participants**

The aim of the study is to examine national identity talk in depth and in situated, local interactions. This is best done with a small scale sample. Because I am also interested in situated, idiosyncratic constructions of national identity and their interaction with other identity repertoires (particularly racial or class-related), participants were sampled purposively for racial and socio-economic diversity. The aim was to have a selection of participants broadly mirroring the demographic composition of the province of KwaZulu-Natal. As already mentioned in footnote 3 in Chapter 1, the use of racial identity categories is a subject that needs thorough reflection, particularly in the context of social science research on South Africa. In the footnote, I suggested that racial categorizations continue to have a strong role in structuring South African society and people's identities. This will be reflected in their everyday talk, the identity repertoires they produce and the identity projects they pursue. For these reasons, race was taken into account as a category of analysis in this study, *inter alia* when composing a diverse sample of participants. Using racial categorizations in this way, however, does not imply my acceptance of their validity. In line with the overall constructivist perspective of this dissertation, my understanding of race and all related designators of racial identity is as social, not biological, constructs. A local journalist specialized in education helped me select a list of seven secondary schools in different parts of Msunduzi that would allow me to constitute a diverse sample of learners. After permission from the Provincial

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<sup>37</sup> This conflict escalated when the IFP – with covert support of the apartheid military forces – launched a military attack from IFP dominated rural areas on ANC strongholds in the township of Edendale (the location of School C), resulting in the 'seven-day war' in which hundreds were killed (Kentridge 1990).

Department of Education was obtained, the headmaster from each of the seven schools was approached with a request for cooperation. Table 1 presents the profiles of the participating schools and the composition of the groups.

*Table 1 Profiles of the participating schools and composition of the groups*

Group	School	School: historical learner profile	School: current learner profile	Socio- economic setting	Demographics Participants	Age participants	Gender Participants
1	A	100% white	97% black	Middle class, urban	black (4), white (1), 'coloured' (1)	16-17	females (2) males (4)
2	A	100% white	97% black	Middle class, urban	black (6)	16-17	females (3) males (3)
3	B	100% Indian	80% Indian, 20% black	Working class, urban	Indian (6)	16-17	females (4) males (2)
4	B	100% Indian	80% Indian, 20% black	Working class, urban	Indian (4) black (2)	16-17	Females (4) Males (2)
5	C	100% black	100% black	Lower working class, former township	black (6)	16-17	Females (3) Males (3)
6	C	100% black	100% black	Lower working class, former township	black (6)	16-17	Females (3) Males (3)
7	D	100% white	50% white, 40% black, 10% other	(upper) Middle class, urban	black (4) white (3)	16-17	Females (7)
8	D	100% white	50% white, 40% black, 10% other	(upper) Middle class, urban	black (5) white (1)	16-17	Females (6)
9	E	100% white, Afrikaans- speaking	99% white, 1 % other	Middle class, urban	white (6)	16-17	Females (4) Males (2)
10	E	100% white, Afrikaans- speaking	99% white, 1 % other	Middle class, urban	white (6)	16-17	Females (3) Males (3)

Two of the seven schools decided not to participate in the study: an upper-class private boys' school and a lower/middle class public, Muslim boys' school. In each of the remaining schools, the headmaster or one of the teachers made a list of 12 learners from Grade 11 classes (13 in School D) to participate in the focus groups.

Two series of 10 focus groups were held, one in 2007 and one in 2008. The total number of participants was 61 each year. Each series consisted of two focus groups per school, each with 6 participants (with the exception of Group 7 that had 7 participants). The same learners participated in both years, with some exceptions, for instance in those cases where learners were ill or had moved out of the school. A short questionnaire, asking about certain sociological characteristics of learners such as age, gender, place of residence, home language, was distributed amongst all participants. All participants in the focus groups were familiar with each other as classmates. This factor should also be taken into account when analyzing the interactional dynamics of the conversations.

Of the 61 initial (2007) participants, 33 learners were black (mostly isiZulu-speaking), 17 were white (of which 12 Afrikaans- and 5 English-speaking), 10 Indian South Africans and one was what is being referred to as a 'Coloured' person. Of this group, 39 participants were female and 22 were male.<sup>38</sup> In terms of socio-economic status, the 'mainstream' is over-represented in the sample that consists of learners of middle class backgrounds (60%) and working-class/lower economic backgrounds (40%). Unfortunately, the two extreme ends of the spectrum – the upper class (attending private elite schools) and the most impoverished groups (school drop-outs, or those who never attended (high) school) – are missing in the sample. In the Appendix on page 185 a short background profile of each of the five schools is provided.

### **A word on 'Model-C schools'**

When racial segregation in schools was gradually terminated in the early 1990s, white public schools could choose to transform along different policy models, ranging from full privatization to remaining a state school. Each model provided for a different model for the future financing and governance of the school as well as different regulations for the admission of black children (Tikly and Mabogoane 1997:162). 'Model-C' – an in-between model of semi-privatization, where the state pays teacher salaries and the school community the other costs – was the most widely chosen model. In those early days of transformation, there were important restrictions to the opening up of the Model-C schools to non-white learners: the schools had to remain 51% white and the cultural ethos of the school had to remain 'intact' (Tikly and Mabogoane 1997:162). According to

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<sup>38</sup> This imbalance is mainly due to the fact that one of the participating schools is a female-only school.

some authors, this was a strategy by the government to prevent ‘white flight’ to private schools (Selod and Zenou 2001:355). Critics have argued that the regulations for Model-C schools – such as the freedom of the schools to raise additional fees and set admission standards – were ways to retain privileged opportunities either on the basis of race (Dolby 1999:293) or class (Tikly and Mabogoane 1997:162).<sup>39</sup> The 1996 South African Schools Act brought an official end to racial quotas in schools, as well as to the different Models. However, certain key regulations for Model-C schools remained in place, such as their freedom to raise additional school fees and set up admission policies. The association of former Model-C schools with bastions of privilege in the new South Africa remains widespread. However, as emphasized above, while race was historically the primary criteria for access to these better-off schools, today class is often the determining factor. Because of higher fees and commuting distances, only the middle- and upper-class black parents can afford to send their children to these schools. As a result, a small minority of former Model-C schools nowadays has a predominantly black learner population. At the level of race it thus seems fair to conclude that former Model-C schools have experienced an important degree of desegregation, particularly when compared to exclusive, privately owned schools. Former Model-C schools continue to be denoted as ‘Model-C schools’ in everyday language.

### **Timing of the focus groups: directly after two significant events**

Crucial in the research design was the fact that I held focus groups with the same groups of learners at two different moments in time, immediately after a ‘critical event’ had occurred that impacted on ‘the national mood’: an international sports victory (2007) and a wave of xenophobic violence (2008). Although very different in nature, both events had in common that they triggered an enormous reaction from the general public. In the ensuing public response, it was clear that each event invoked debates on the meaning of South Africa as a nation or was more implicitly associated with the topic of South African national identity. The events therefore served as perfect catalysts for the focus-group discussions. They created a lively, but each time very different background against which to explore participants’ constructions of national identity. The two events created ideal contrasting situations that brought the temporal variability of identity constructions and the related processes of meaning-making, contestation and negotiation into sharp relief.

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<sup>39</sup> Tikly and Mabogoane argue that ‘the introduction of the Model-C school has signified a shift away from the overt racism of segregationist laws towards a more subtle process, whereby parents are allowed to preserve their educational privilege through control over the cultural and religious ethos of Model-C schools as well as over language and admissions policies (Tikly and Mabogoane 1997:162).

The first series of 10 focus groups took place between October 24<sup>th</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup> 2007, just days after the South African national rugby team had won the Rugby World Cup Final in France (20<sup>th</sup> October 2007). The second series of 10 focus groups took place in the between July 17<sup>th</sup> and August 2008, shortly after the wave of xenophobic violence throughout South Africa had made big headlines.

### **Procedure and content of the focus groups**

The focus-group interviews were held on the premises of the school during school hours. Each interview lasted on average an hour and a half. All focus groups were moderated by myself, in English. I attempted to ensure in a friendly and informal manner that the focus-group discussion covered the broadly predetermined set of topics, whilst leaving plenty of time and space for spontaneously raised related topics (cf. Wodak et al. 2009:106). I structured and summarized the discussion, encouraged all participants to contribute to the discussions and tried to ensure – to the extent possible – a balanced participation by all.

The conversations were loosely structured around a general interview guide with a range of topics but left a significant amount of space for spontaneous conversation between participants. Importantly, in both series of focus groups, talk about the event in question was primed by the circulation of a newspaper clipping covering the event. The ensuing discussions were set up in such a way that I, as the moderator, introduced the main topics that participants would then discuss amongst each other. I emphasized in each focus group that discussions would be open, with participants feeling free to speak their minds, and that anonymity of all participants would be guaranteed. I asked and received participants' permission to tape-record the interviews.

Although a free-flowing discussion with little intervention from the moderator was the ideal aimed at, the degree to which this succeeded varied greatly between the focus groups. In some groups, the interview guide was used very loosely since spontaneous discussions made probing and follow-up questions unnecessary. In other groups, the interview guide was followed quite literally as participants did not speak much, left to themselves. In the latter groups the role of the moderator was, unfortunately, greater than intended.

### *Topics in 2007*

After introducing myself and the main objectives of my research project, I explained that I was specifically interested in 'what it means to be South African' for the participants. As a 'warm-up' topic, I presented a poster of the South African Rugby Team holding the World

Cup Trophy (from the local newspaper 'The Witness', 21.10.2007). This triggered a first round of reactions about the importance of this event in relation to feelings of national identity. Admittedly, the type of media representation chosen already attributes a particular meaning to the event, and this should be taken into account in the analysis of the talk on the event.

After this, the discussion was divided into four thematic blocs. The research interest of the first bloc evolved around the meanings and content attributed to 'South Africa' as a nation and 'South Africans' as people. Questions to incite the discussion were: how would you describe South Africa to a foreigner, what would you include in a museum about South Africa, are there typical things that South Africans have in common? The second thematic bloc was 'the process of national identification and its importance'. This involved questions about participants' own feelings of national identity and those of other South Africans. The third and fourth thematic blocs specifically covered national identity in relation to diversity. The choice was made to explicitly discuss this topic in light of South African history and the new nation's political ambition to build a country of 'unity in diversity'. First, general ideas and opinions on diversity in South Africa were probed. Secondly, we discussed experiences of diversity in participants' daily lives: in the school, the neighbourhood, in relation to friendships. In this discussion, I attempted to refrain from framing the subject of unity in diversity as problematic, as is the tendency in much of the theoretical literature on nationhood.

### *Topics in 2008*

The 2008 discussions began with the moderator, with the aid of participants, summarizing and looking back on the discussions of 2007. Secondly, two press clippings on the xenophobic attacks were distributed to elicit general reactions. The headlines read: '*Xenophobia hits South Africa's standing*' and '*I really hate your country*' (both Mail and Guardian, 30.5.2008 to 05.6.2008). In the ensuing discussion, the topic was related to the issue of national identity and to subthemes such as the place of foreigners in South Africa and the image of South Africa in the eyes of other Africans.

A second theme of discussion in 2008, not directly related to the xenophobic attacks, was the issue of emigration. The theme was explicitly introduced because it had emerged as a very relevant subtheme to the discussion on national identity in 2007. The theme was also introduced by means of a press clipping reporting increasing numbers of South Africans of all population groups emigrating. The ensuing discussion was about the possible reasons for people leaving the country, the relation to their sense of national identity, participants' personal feelings about emigration and so on. In the eventual data

analysis that is being presented in this dissertation, I chose not to focus on that part of the discussion.

### **Transcription convention**

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. My primary interest was in the content of the talk – the words and ideas expressed by the speakers. A secondary point of interest were the general organisation features and the processes of interaction between speakers. For these purposes a fairly basic transcription notation was used that does not follow a published system.<sup>40</sup> It includes both the utterances of the participants and those of the interviewer, pauses, hesitations and non-verbal utterances. Brackets were used to indicate non-verbal acts or sounds, for example laughter, uncertain hearings or indecipherable words.<sup>41</sup>

### **Mapping out patterns with Atlas Ti**

To aid with this process all transcripts were stored into Atlas Ti, a qualitative data analysis software program ([www.atlasti.de](http://www.atlasti.de)). This program makes it easy to index thematic content, by sorting data into coded segments which can be filed and retrieved easily. Such coding turned out to be helpful for instance for the counting of instances of a certain theme occurring across a large corpus of transcripts, to ‘assess how widespread a phenomenon in the data actually is’ (Seale in Silverman 2009:256). With the use of the ‘family’ tool, coded segments can be grouped, allowing for the sorting of data into categories and subcategories. As emphasized above, the idea that multiple versions of a

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<sup>40</sup> It was, however, informed by the transcription notation used by Gray, Delany and Durrheim (2005)

<sup>41</sup> The main features of my transcription notation are as follows:

... indicates hesitations or pauses between parts of a speaker’s utterance

*Text* indicates the use of a non-English word (usually Afrikaans or isiZulu)

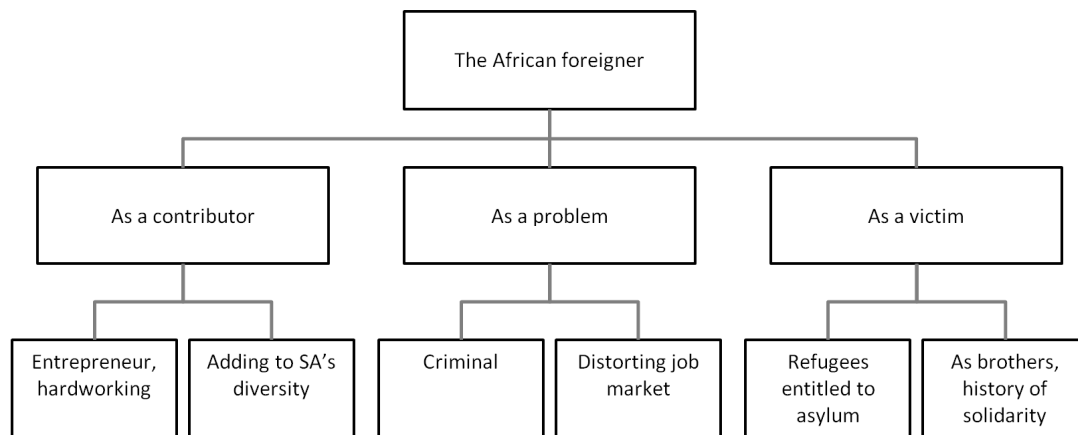
? question marks are used to indicate rising inflections

[text] text in brackets provides additional information to the reader about features other than verbal utterances, such as [laughter] or other expressions of emotions [arghh]. Text in brackets may also indicate speech that was inaudible [inaudible]. Lastly, it may provide a translation of a non-English word, or refer to words or concepts that are not taken up in the immediate citation but are indirectly referred to in the utterance.

[*text*] italic text in brackets indicates utterances of other speakers that are simultaneously expressed as that of the speaker cited, or utterances of several speakers at the same time, e.g: [*They’re not doing anything with their lives...that’s right*]

theme or subject are possible is a central point of departure in my research. Many themes in everyday discourse are sites of conflict that can be construed in multiple, often contradictory ways. These multiple ways of constructing a subject are supported by different, often competing repertoires that people can draw from in their talk. In the diagram below, it is demonstrated how the Atlas program can help visualize the multiple ways in which an ideologically charged theme like that of ‘the African Foreigner’ can be and was constructed. This way, the program literally helped with the exercise of mapping out patterns of repetition and variation, and the interpretative repertoires that feed into these constructions.

*Figure 1. 2008 Interviews: Example of the multiple meanings of the notion of ‘The African Foreigner’*



Atlas Ti turned out to be particularly helpful in the first phase of my data analysis, when it was important to rapidly retrieve large strings of words and make comparisons between different settings (Silverman 2009:163). It was less useful for a detailed analysis of a text segment, and therefore was abandoned in the second level of my analysis, which was focused on assessing themes within their situated conversational context. In Chapters Five and Six on data analysis, I will show how these conversational dynamics were assessed by means of concrete examples from the interviews.

### **Analysis: interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas, action-orientation**

The transcripts provide a rich body of data on participants' discursive constructions of national identity. Because my research is guided by an inductive approach, categorizations of themes in the data were not predefined but drawn up after the data were collected. Of course, the broad concepts in the interview guides *were* predefined: national identity, South Africa as a nation, South Africans as people, feelings of national identity, diversity, the Rugby World Cup, xenophobia and emigration. But as expected, all



these themes turned out to be sites of debate and contestation, allowing for multiple versions. Furthermore, because the interviews were semi-structured and allowed for a great deal of freedom on the part of the participants, discussions often covered a varied and wide range of topics.

The first step in the process of data analysis involved the identification of *interpretative repertoires*. As Wetherell and Potter (1992) have suggested, this cannot be done without in-depth knowledge of the broader socio-historical context, in this case the history of South African nationhood and the post-apartheid nation-building project. For these purposes, I thoroughly reviewed the relevant academic, political and media sources. Being a resident of South Africa for a period of two years enabled me to acquire a broad insight into what could be called ‘the discursive space of South African national identity’, its main themes and counter-themes. The results of this review are found in Chapter Three of this dissertation, which describes the ideological history of South African national identity discourse.

Against this background knowledge, the interview transcripts were repeatedly read and analyzed. With the aid of the Atlas Ti program, the interview material was organized thematically. At the same time, however, I took care not to isolate extracts from their direct conversational environment. As some researchers have warned (see e.g. Condor, Gibson and Abell 2006:136-137), transcription segmentation runs the risk of losing valuable information about the narrative sequencing of talk, as well as the broader conversational dynamics of a group discussion. In line with Wetherell’s synthetic approach, the analysis went beyond the analysis of thematic content to include a focus on the interactional processes at work in the conversation.

The general purpose of the thematic analysis was to generate a thematic ‘road map’, an overview of the main themes that were covered in the interviews, including patterns of repetition and variation. This involved both themes that seemed widespread – that could indicate the commonsensical, routine, normative resources – as well as contested themes and peripheral themes. It also turned out to be important to pay attention to things that were not said. In line with the theoretical approach in this study, two levels of variation are important: variations between different groups at the same moment in time and variations across time, both within groups and between different groups.

In this process, I was specifically attentive to contrary themes and *ideological dilemmas* within the data. Patterns of variability and contradiction were mapped out and analyzed in depth for the work that they might be accomplishing. My interest was first of all in the

variations within the accounts at one specific moment in time, because these might indicate the ideologically dilemmatic nature of established, commonsensical repertoires about the nation and national identity.

In the second part of the analysis, I focused more strongly on how themes were constructed within the specific context of the conversation interaction. Why this utterance here? What was the tone of the preceding conversation? Who were the dominant speakers? What might have been at stake for the speaker at this particular moment, given the tone of the conversation and the immediate audience present? Did the talk bear evidence of certain strategic interests that speakers might have with broader audiences, both domestic (South African) and international? In other words: What is the *action-orientation* of this particular version of South African national identity? This last element in the analysis focused on how speakers were attuning their accounts to the context at hand, taking the context on all three levels into account (although the emphasis is on the second and third level context, and purely linguistic analysis is not part of this study). This part of the analysis involved examining and interpreting why a speaker may forward a particular version of national identity, or more generally a particular version of the social world at a particular moment, and how the factors of the context may influence this process. What could be inferred from the influence of the concrete setting of the talk – location of the conversation, relations with co-participants, presence of the interviewer, sociological factors of the speakers – and the dynamics in the broader macro social context of the discursive construction of national identity by the participants?

It also involved differentiating what is being said along the lines of the social location of speakers: specifically their racial, ethnic and class backgrounds. To what extent was the group homogeneous in terms of these demographic criteria (all the same racial background, class background, ethnic background)? Did the discursive interaction on certain themes differ in homogeneous groups from that in heterogeneous groups? Which themes were dominant in which particular groups, and which themes were peripheral? How were certain themes negotiated, promoted or silenced in the different groups? In this analytical process there was no strict separation between analysis of content and analysis of interaction. Instead, I constantly moved back and forth between the two types of analyses. Throughout this analysis, I moved back and forth from the interview data to historical background information (Chapter Three) and theoretical insights (Chapter Two). The interpretation of the data was an interplay between the insights that emerged from the data and the broader background knowledge in which those insights could be

embedded.<sup>42</sup> Reporting on this complete analytical process is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and the two empirical chapters that follow will present a selection of this analysis.

## Ethical considerations

When it comes to the ethical considerations regarding the project, there are two dimensions to address: the ethical practices applied in the project and the question of reflexivity. Generally speaking, reflexivity is about the moral deliberation on the politics of particular research practices. It is about reflecting on and accounting for the choices made throughout the project, with a special focus on the interactions between myself as researcher and the research subjects. The second part of this section will be devoted to these issues. First, I will set out the concrete ethical practices applied in the research project.<sup>43</sup>

### Ethical practices

#### *Access and informed consent*

As mentioned in the section on the selection of schools, general permission to conduct the research project at the schools in question was obtained from the Provincial Department of Education in response to a letter that set out the purpose of the research and the details of the interviews to be held in the schools. The next step for the first round of focus groups was to send a letter to the principals of the participating schools with similar information. On the basis of this information, each school agreed to participate. Subsequently, arrangements were made over the phone with the principal or another contact person appointed in the school to plan the focus groups and decide on the procedure for recruiting participants. In each case, the principal or contact person selected two Grade Eleven Classes from which participants would be recruited. In each school, I indicated to the principal or contact person what composition of focus groups I had in mind (specifically with regard to the socio-demographic backgrounds of the participants – e.g. race, gender, class). In one school (School A), the contact person actively involved me in the composition of the two groups. In yet another school (School D) participants were recruited on the spot from a physical education class I happened to be observing. In the other three schools, the principal or contact person took firm charge

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<sup>42</sup> This also involved the building up of knowledge about the socio-historical context and the ongoing public debates about issues relevant for the theme of national identity, via academic sources and media sources.

<sup>43</sup> My research proposal has not been evaluated by a separate research ethics committee since this is not required as part of the VU University guidelines for PhD projects. The proposal has, however, been approved by the general academic committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the VU University Amsterdam.

of selecting the participants and my own input was minimal (apart from the broad indication regarding composition). Before proceeding, all aspiring participants were informed about the research project through an information leaflet that set out the purpose and proceedings of the focus groups. The leaflet emphasized that anonymity of all participants would be guaranteed. It further stressed that participation was on a fully voluntary basis. Aspiring participants were subsequently asked to sign the leaflet indicating their consent. Because of the average age of the participants (16-17 years old), I decided that consent could be obtained directly from them and parental consent was not necessary. School C was the only school where the principal insisted on obtaining the informed consent of the parents. In this school, in addition to the forms signed by participants, consent forms were signed by parents. In 2008, I sent a letter to all schools that had participated in 2007 to request permission to conduct two more focus groups in their school with the exact same learners as in 2007. Because participants had consented to participate in the overall research project when signing the leaflet in 2007, I refrained from collecting informed consent at this stage, with the exception of the few new participants that replaced some of the 2007 participants in 2008. At the start of each focus group, I indicated my intention to record the discussions on tape for the purposes of my transcription and analysis. I emphasized that participants were free to refrain from participating in case they objected to the recording, but none of them did.

### *Confidentiality*

Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their participation in the project. The audiotapes were used solely for the purpose of transcription and analysis by myself, and stored in a safe place. All participants were referred to by pseudonyms in all reports and research papers as well as in the current manuscript. At the beginning of each focus group I asked all participants to equally respect the confidentiality of the discussions.

### *Nonmaleficence and beneficence*

It was emphasized both on the information leaflet and in the introduction to the focus groups that participation would be voluntary and participants were free to terminate their participation at any stage during the research process. I further stressed that I would be open to answer any additional questions they might have regarding the procedure or the content of the research project.

The question of beneficence relates to the added social value the research might have for the community involved. One immediate social value was that the focus groups offered an opportunity for the learners involved to reflect on, discuss and develop their thoughts about socially relevant and timely topics. The question of national identity is addressed in

the South African curriculum for 'Life Orientation' for Grade 11, but the way in which it was discussed in the focus groups was novel to many learners. For some, the experience of debating substantive matters in a fairly informal, strongly interactive setting was clearly new and highly welcomed. In general, participation was active and enthusiastic across all schools, suggesting learners' appreciation of an opportunity to articulate their views on these matters and engage in discussions with their peers. In relation to this, a broader social value of the study could be that it gives voice to the generation in which so much hope for South Africa's future is invested, and directly registers how members of that generation make sense of their social worlds. These insights might deepen our understanding of the ongoing process of social transformation in South Africa and its manifestations at the level of the everyday life of young South Africans.

A key question that relates to matters of nonmaleficence and beneficence is the use of the terms coined under apartheid to denote South African population groups as relevant identity categories in my research. As explained elsewhere in this dissertation, I came to the conclusion that the use of these categories was indeed relevant to my research, because of their continuing role in organizing social life in South Africa.

### **Reflexivity**

Within a qualitative, interpretive study such as mine, ethical considerations are about more than the practical steps taken to ensure consent and confidentiality. They are also about reflecting on the interactions between the researcher and the researched, as well as the more general position of the researcher within his or her research field (cf. Ybema, Yanow and Wels 2009:9). A crucial point of departure is that the nature of these interactions, the researchers' positionality and questions of power between these actors ('interactional power') are likely to have an impact on the material collected. Compared to ethnographic studies, the concrete 'site' in which these interactions take place is clearly demarcated and fairly restricted in my case: it is the focus-group interview itself. In line with Hollander (2004:631), I approach focus groups not as a research instrument, but as a research site. Focus groups are interview types in which interactional power is especially relevant, not only between interviewer and interviewee but also among the different participants in the interview. Because of my central interest in talk-in-interaction, interactions between participants in the focus groups are a core focus and have been part of the analysis throughout the project. However, there are a number of aspects of these dynamics that merit reflection here. I will also reflect on the ways in which the set-up of the project and my own role within it might have impacted on the findings.

*Power dynamics within the focus-group process*

The first point to address here relates to the power dynamics between the different participants within the focus groups, and how these might have impacted on the discussions. In her 2004 article, Hollander emphasizes the importance of analyzing focus groups as social contexts:

The social contexts of focus groups – that is, the relationships among the participants and between the participants and the facilitator, as well as the larger social structures within which the discussion takes place – affect the data that are generated in ways that have not yet been widely acknowledged by focus group researchers (Hollander 2004:604).

In what follows, she distinguishes four levels of context that are relevant to the interactional dynamics: the associational context, the status context, the conversational context and the relational context. The associational context refers to the ‘common characteristic that brings the participants together’. In my study, participants in a group were all learners of the same group within the same school. The fact that the interview took place on the premises of the school and during school hours is likely to have impacted on the focus-group participants and the discussions. The institutionalized channels of the school provided a practical way to get access to and bring together groups of mutually acquainted young South Africans. But beyond pragmatics, I recognize that the ‘school route’ and its related power dynamics might have had a particular impact on my project and my findings. One of the drawbacks of this route was that I had to deal with principals or teachers as ‘gatekeepers’ and with the institutional context of the school setting in general. To what extent can we truly speak of ‘voluntary participation’ when the principal asks learners to participate in a focus group that takes place in the school during school hours? How could I create an interview setting that was based on equal participation and a non-hierarchical relationship between myself and the participants, and thereby ‘circumvent’ dominant cultures of authority within the schools? The most satisfactory way of dealing with this challenge was to accept that the focus group could not be isolated or sanitized from the organizational culture of the school and instead to reflect on the ways in which participants’ discourses were shaped by their school identities. References to these school identities were made in each of the discussions, and they were taken on board in my final analysis. The school culture and the question of power relations within the school setting also impacted on what Hollander calls ‘cultural conversational norms’, the norms that govern conversations in particular settings. The difference between schools that clearly encouraged a climate of critical engagement, debate and horizontal relations between learners and staff and schools with a more authoritarian model of education was obvious. These impressions were supported

by the information obtained from interviews with the principals and teachers (that were also recorded and transcribed but not directly included in the empirical analysis presented here).

A point that particularly worried me was the question of the pre-selection of participants by the principal or teacher, as happened in three of the five schools. To illustrate the potential bias in this process: in school B a number of participants wore a 'prefect' broche, indicating that they were among the top learners in their class. Even though I made it clear that I wanted to speak to a cross-section of pupils, it was in these cases inevitable that the most eloquent, high-achieving learners ended up participating in the groups. This relates to Hollander's second level of context, the status context: 'the relative position of participants in local or societal status hierarchies' (2004:615). Within different focus groups, individual participants held different status positions leading to specific power dynamics within the group. Gender, race and to a lesser extent class differences between group members were inevitably at play within each of the focus groups. An interesting example was school E, which operates using an 'academically structured' system, meaning that learners are attributed to classes hierarchically according to their academic qualities. In Focus Group Number 10, in which two males from the 'top' class and three females and one male from the 'second' class participated, the impact of these status differences was obvious. The two 'top class males' were verbally and intellectually dominant from the very start of the discussion. This confirms 'expectation states theory' that, according to Hollander, suggests that 'those with a higher status tend to talk more and assume more leadership roles in a group' (Hollander 2004:615). The other participants were clearly at pains to keep up and at times were corrected or silenced by the top class males.

This brings me to the third of Hollander's levels of context: the conversational context (2004:620). This is about the question of whether a certain kind of meaning begins to dominate in a given context despite the moderator's attempts to elicit differences in and richness of experiences. Here, too, the status of different participants and the power relations among them impact on the course of the discussion, with those with more power having a stronger influence on its content and meanings. I saw these power dynamics clearly at work in the same group, Group 10. But also in other groups, the tone was often set by one or two outspoken individuals. The question that remains unanswered is what the course of the discussion would have been without these outspoken participants and which themes were effectively silenced by their presence. If subjective meanings of individual participants were the key research interest in my

project, these issues would pose limitations to the results. A solution would then be to hold individual interviews with each of the participants to complement the focus groups. By contrast, my research interest is precisely the collective construction of meaning within groups, communication between people and the ways in which dominant discourses work. For example, we will see how a particular discourse – an optimistic Rainbow discourse – turns out to be normative in several of my focus groups, complicating or even silencing the expression of alternative discourses. These findings of the focus groups, including all the inherent power dynamics impacting on them, are a key object of analysis unto themselves. Additional individual interviews were not believed to be an essential complement to this study.

Hollander's last level of context is the relational context, 'the degree of prior acquaintance among the participants' (2004:621). As states above, the fact that all my participants knew each other as classmates needs to be taken into consideration in the analysis of the discussions. One consequence is for instance that they participate in the same associational context – their school – and thus may be exposed to similar discourses about a range of relevant issues within the premises of the school. In other words, they are sharing a common collective identity and a world of everyday experience as learners of a particular school. By consequence, they continue to be acquainted and confronted with each other outside of the demarcated 'site' of the focus group, and they will be managing their social relations with each other keeping this longer-term interest in mind.

These four levels of context set out in Hollander's article helped me reflect on questions of interactional power both throughout the conduct and the analysis of the focus-group material. It helped shape the interpretations of the focus-group discussions that are reported in Chapters Five and Six.

#### *My own position as a researcher and focus-group moderator*

The final, but not least important question left to address here is my own position as researcher and moderator of the focus groups. Early on in the research project I made the choice to moderate all focus-group discussions myself. This was in part motivated by pragmatism – I had no budget for working with research assistants. But it was also a conscious choice motivated by the wish to be closely involved in the focus-group process, to create comparable settings in each school in terms of relations between researcher and researched, and to ensure a degree of consistency in the interview topics addressed. A key question that I had throughout the project was that of the impact of my own nationality on the process. Did my position as a national of a 'North-Western', long-



established European nation-state impact on the discourse on South African national identity generated in the focus groups? In particular, could it be the cause of participants' strong preoccupation with South Africa's image in the eyes of the 'West', a phenomenon that will be described in detail in Chapter Five? Was the observed normativity of the optimistic Rainbow discourse influenced in any critical way by my presence in the focus groups, by my directly representing a non-South African audience? What would these discussions have been like if moderated by a South African compatriot, or for instance by an African outsider? Although it is of key importance to be aware of and reflect on these dynamics, it is impossible to answer these questions within the scope of this section. Comparing my own findings with studies of others – such as Eaton's 2006 study that was moderated by South African nationals – would be an interesting way to shed more light on these issues.

On a less evidence-based note, my impression when conducting the focus groups was that my position as a non-national impacted positively on the discussions. Talking about their nation to a relatively uninformed (at least that is how I presented myself) outsider seemed to give a fresh impetus to these speakers' talk about their nation. Because of my non-national background, I sensed that I was, so to speak, placed in the 'neutral' category of being an observer of instead of a participant in the complex, charged and often racialized South African public debate. Obviously, it would be naive to think that my own racial background was without any relevance to the proceedings. In the South African context racialized identities always play a role. For instance, it is very possible that my white, Dutch background had a particular impact on the discussions in the Afrikaner school E. It is difficult to say anything conclusive about these processes here and I will restrict myself to acknowledging these power dynamics.

A more concrete question was whether participants would be able to see me as different from the school teachers with whom they normally had their interactions within these classroom settings. I deliberately attempted to create an ambiance of horizontal relations and free, informal discussions. However, the success I had in creating that ambiance varied. In School C, the township school with a 100% black learner population from relatively impoverished background, learners clearly found it difficult to open up to the format of free-flowing discussion and to speak to me as if I was a peer. One can only speculate about the reasons behind this. Did it have to do with the racial, national or class position I represented for them – more removed from their worlds of experience than was the case for learners in the other schools? Or did it have to do with the issue of the 'school culture' referred to above? Or was it simply a matter of a language barrier, given

that these learners did not have the level of fluency in English as their peers in Model-C schools? Whatever the cause, the result was that I was playing a more prominent role in these discussions, teasing out responses and actively offering turns to different speakers. In these instances it was difficult to 'fade into the background and let the participants control the discussion' (Hollander 2004:261).

As for the interactions and power dynamics between interviewer and interviewees my experiences reflect the points made by Limerick and co-authors (1996). They stress that instead of a dichotomous power relation with a powerful interviewer and less powerful interviewees, interviewing settings manifest the shifting dynamics of relative powers between both parties. On the one hand, the fact that I organized the focus groups, chose the setting, decided on the time planning and introduced an interview guide all suggest little agency of the interviewees in the process. At the same time, where the ambiance for informal, horizontal discussions was successfully created, interviewees turned out to be highly pro-active participants. Several times they took charge of the research agenda, or reversed roles by posing me questions. I was frequently asked what my own thoughts were about South Africa, a question that made me feel slightly uncomfortable and that I preferred not to answer in depth during the course of the focus group. My solution was to postpone these questions to the end of the discussion, when I felt my answering them would no longer have a direct impact on the course of the discussion. These kinds of examples illustrate the fact that instead of a one-directional exchange, the interviews became a shared activity in which interviewer and interviewee constantly negotiated their own roles.

In the phase of the analysis, however, I myself clearly exerted most control over the research process. As Limerick and co-authors, referring to Geertz (1988), write: 'The researchers' powerful control of the interpretation and the resulting presentation appears to be inevitable' (Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace 1996:458). On the other hand, even in this phase, the direct input of the interviewee takes centre stage. In the critical discursive psychological approach the analyst stays close to the 'raw material', in this case the transcripts of the talk-in-interaction recorded during the interviews. It is the literal, original wording of my interviewees' statements – lengthy extracts and quotations from the interviews – that forms the basis of the analysis. Therefore, the voices of the young people that participated in the project literally resonate throughout this study. Let us turn to them in more detail now.



# Chapter 5: Young South Africans talk about their nation

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## Introduction

In this and the following chapter, the talk of sixty young South Africans will take centre stage. Twenty focus-group discussions with these young people – held in two phases in 2007 and 2008 – generated a total of 570 pages of interview transcripts. In these two empirical chapters, we will be familiarizing ourselves with the most important features of these group interviews, discovering and analyzing the discursive landscape that unfolds in the transcripts. The focus of this first chapter is on how South Africa's national identity – and specifically the categories of the South African nation and the South African people – is discursively (re)produced within the local contexts of conversational interaction in the focus groups. In the 2007 focus-group discussions I posed two questions to elicit talk about these two categories:

- 1) How would you describe to me, as a foreigner, what makes South Africa unique?
- 2) What are your thoughts on whether South Africans as people have something in common: are there things that all South Africans share?<sup>44</sup>

The first question was posed in all focus groups, and triggered discussions of similar length in most groups – with the exception of one in which the discussion was short (Group 2). The second question was posed in eight of the ten groups. It was thus possible to compare the responses to these questions and look for patterns or variations across focus groups. In the first section of this chapter, I will examine constructions of South African national identity that are *inwardly* oriented, that are about the construction of a sense of similarity and collective identity *within* the South African national community. A central theme in this first empirical chapter is how young South Africans talk about processes of in-and exclusion that they experience within the post-apartheid context, for instance around the topic of affirmative action. This theme was raised spontaneously in many groups, which could be taken as a signal that it relates in some way or another to

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<sup>44</sup> In the social psychological literature this has been theorized as 'prototypicality'; see for instance Eaton (2006).

people's experiences of national identity. The second section of this chapter will focus on *outwardly* oriented constructions of national identity. The interview material presented in this chapter is primarily derived from the 2007 focus groups, because it was in these interviews that the general questions about South Africa as a nation and South Africans as people were discussed most extensively. Chapter Six will specifically examine how these constructions of the South African nation and South African people shift under the impact of two critical events: an international sports triumph and an outburst of xenophobic violence committed by fellow nationals.

The presentation of interview material in this chapter is selective and driven by one main concern: to provide a rich insight into the multiple, dynamic ways in which young South Africans are negotiating and giving meaning to their South Africanness. I hope to demonstrate how they are 'doing South Africanness' in talk, and how they are responsive to so many complex features of their social context during that activity.<sup>45</sup>

## Constructing the South African national community

The first finding was that across all focus groups, answers to the two questions above were predominantly informed by the 'Rainbow Nation repertoire' and its subthemes of unity in (cultural) diversity, reconciliation, non-racialism, freedom and equality (as outlined in Chapter Three). In the thematic analysis of the answers to the two questions above, I found that many of the Rainbow subthemes were reproduced by the participants; in each group there featured at least one Rainbow subtheme. I argue that the Rainbow repertoire was the *dominant* repertoire across my data on the basis of two criteria: first, in all cases, a Rainbow theme or subtheme was introduced spontaneously as the first or second most important characteristic of South Africa, and second, the importance of this theme for South African nationhood was uncontested in most groups.

### People: cultural diversity and non-racialism

The first characteristic of the South African nation, mentioned instantly in six out of ten groups, is cultural diversity, and in all instances speakers evaluate this positively, constructing diversity as a source of strength. By drawing on this repertoire, speakers constructed the category of South Africa as a country defined, united and enriched by its cultural diversity, and South Africans as people as united in their diversity. In all ten groups, this interpretation of cultural diversity features at least as one of the characteristics mentioned. In three groups, the term Rainbow Nation is explicitly used in

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<sup>45</sup> All interviewees in this study have been given pseudonyms for purposes of anonymity.

descriptions of the cultural diversity of the country, as for instance in the following quotes:

Int: If you were to explain to me as a foreigner what South Africa is all about, what makes South Africa unique, what are the characteristics that I should know, if I don't know anything about your country, how would you describe it to me?

Talika: It's diverse. I think that's the first thing that will pop into everyone's mind.

Zanele: The Rainbow.

Talika: Yeah. It's always been described as a Rainbow Nation, of a whole lot of cultures coming together and that's what makes South Africa what it is. No matter ...whether we have bad rugby players, or bad cricket players, or the crime is high, or whatever, that's one thing that we can always depend on, is everyone coming together and working together as one big family.

Int: Anyone disagree with that? You all agree? [Group: Yes].

Indian female, black female, Group 4, 2007

Int: You [Mike] wanted to say something?

Mike: Yeah, and I think there's sort of a Rainbow Nation vibe. Meaning all sorts of people together, Asian... we have Indians, we have blacks, Xhosa, Sotho... Afrikaners, English, even we have visitors like yourself, coming from other countries. But we are still, when you look at us, we're all one thing, we're united. Though there's still some discrimination here and there but... I'd say it's good.

Black male, Group 6, 2007

In all other groups comparable statements are made that resonate with this positive evaluation of cultural diversity, without directly using the term 'Rainbow Nation'.

Int: Do you think South Africans, do they have certain typical things in common where you would say, 'OK, that really demonstrates that this is a South African here'?

Ntombifuthi: I think it would be hard to because we're so different from each other but then... together, we have that spirit, I don't know how to explain it, but... it's like with our culture, we have like lots of different cultures, you've got like eleven official languages, and that's already like 'Wow', so there's so many people living in one country and there's so many different little things about it and when it comes together, it's just amazing. Even our flag shows that there are so many colours in South Africa, it's great.

Black female, Group 7, 2007

Part of the unity in diversity-repertoire is the idea that cultural diversity is not an obstacle but a source of strength, an opportunity, as was suggested in Mandela's speeches (Chapter Three). That notion clearly echoes in the accounts of speakers across different groups, who evaluate cultural diversity as an opportunity to interact and learn:

Nesira: Yeah, and what's beautiful is that everybody takes the initiative to learn. I mean when you go to the supermarket, and when the teller greets you, sometimes he would say 'Sawubona'. And a few times I'd look at him like: 'OK, what are you saying?' So my father would be next to me to interpret and he would say 'hello', so I repeat him back and I'd say 'hello'. Or sometimes you speak in the opposite language just to... make a joke. And that is how South Africa comes together, and it's, it's absolutely remarkable to be a witness to that. I mean... sometimes when we're in class you would say, 'What do you say for this?' And that person is teaching you and you're part of something so great, you're part of country that is coming together in more ways than one.

Talika: It shows the next person that you are interested in them, and that you're passionate about learning about them.

Nesira: That is what South Africa is: learn.

Thulani: Yes. Learn through people, learn in school, but you also...from a friend, a neighbour, your neighbour also... you know teaches you...

Nesira: And we're developing not only as a country but in ourselves as well. And in our surroundings.

Indian females, black male, Group 4, 2007

The related theme of non-racialism was also reproduced in many focus groups, although less frequently than the cultural diversity theme. Through this theme, speakers constructed South Africa as a nation and South Africans as people that have moved beyond racism. Some speakers simply proclaim an absence of racism in an almost obligatory manner: 'we don't have racism' (black male, Group 5, 2007), 'we welcome every kind of races in South Africa' (black female, Group 6, 2007). In other groups, more elaborate accounts are jointly developed, creating an image of non-racialism truly being lived out in everyday life. In the extract below, speakers commend their own ability to laugh and joke about race. The impression one gets is that these speakers have moved beyond racism *and* non-racialism: race is brought back into the public domain but instead of a divisive issue, it has become a binding force.

Tracy: I also think that it's good... just bringing up all the cultures again... is that we can all laugh at each other. Like, the black people laugh at the white people because we can't dance. And then we laugh at the black people because they can't swim, and we [inaudible] about the Indian people because they have... [others: *like...karaoke*], so we all, we laugh about our own cultures, where we come from, and I think that's good also.

Int: Yeah. In other contexts, some people might be insulted by those things. But here it's not the case?

Lindsay: I think it's mainly our school. I mean I was having a conversation about this... was it with you?

Tracy: No.

Lindsay: Last week actually, it's that, you know it could be just in our school. Our school particularly is very open to each other's feelings. I mean in my hockey... in our hockey team we have an Indian girl, we call her curry, on the hockey field. And, oh my goodness, and people think, like others schools, they're like 'how can you call her that'? I mean like 'what?' It's just funny, it's... you know...

Int: She thinks it's funny too?

Lindsay: Yeah. It works within our school as well. I think with a lot of things that we all... hey... it's like...

English-speaking white females, Group 7, 2007

As discussed in Chapter Two, national narratives commonly have a strong temporal dimension, constructing an image of the national community as moving from the past, through the present and into the future. Indeed, throughout the interviews, references to time – particularly to the past and the future – were frequently made.

### **Approach to the past: reconciliation and moving on**

In light of South Africa's history the past is evidently a complicated resource for narratives of national identity. As we have seen in Chapter Three, finding a constructive and inclusive way of dealing with the past has been a key concern in the nation-building project of the 'new' South Africa. A primary way in which speakers were found to be dealing with the past across the focus groups was by clearly demarcating the difference between the past and the present. The trajectory of the transition from apartheid to democracy in these accounts becomes a source of national pride in itself, and a defining aspect of contemporary South African national identity. Many speakers in different groups emphasized the road South Africa has travelled from apartheid to democracy.



The interview material also reflects the extraordinary presence of the figure of Nelson Mandela in imaginings of South African nationhood. In Chapter Three I described how the discourse on the 'new' South African nation was clearly asserted against the discourse of the 'old' South African nation. Apartheid South Africa functions as the 'significant Other' in the identity project of post-apartheid South Africa. This 'Othering' of the old South Africa manifested itself in many of the focus groups, for example in the mixed Group 4:

Thulani: I'm proud to be South African that to... also have a choice, choice first thing, and I have the ability to do what I wish to do. What I want to be. There are facilities in... do that... but first of all it has to be study. To become what you want to be. You have to study. It wouldn't just come on the table. And... to know that we are free, we are free to do the good things, we are free to do the good things, you can go overseas and study, you can come back, you can help your country. But I'm proud. Yes, I am proud that I am able to do all these things. I'm proud that it's developing, and I'm proud that the cities become more and more than it was in the past [inaudible] and I wouldn't picture myself living in the past South Africa, even if it... [inaudible; others laugh].

Int: In the South Africa of the past?

Thulani: Past, yes. Because we've become more modernized, in a way. Technology advanced and um... Yeah, we just... know new things.

Zanele: Adding to that point, it's like... makes people wonder as... OK, putting aside the black community, if we were living back in apartheid time, like where would we be right now? Because there's so many things that we weren't able to do that we do right now. There's so many places, people, black people, African people, are in high places. African women are making it out there. And to think that if we were living back in those days we wouldn't have been able to do those things, maybe we wouldn't be educated as much as we are right now and... we wouldn't be like you know... like a real South Africa, I mean we would have the higher people and the lower people, and it just like wouldn't be the same. Because I mean, there's so much of things, like happening for us, that never were. And are now happening for us. All because of one person. All because of one person.

Black male, black female, Group 4, 2007

For these two black speakers, the crucial difference between past and present is the freedom of choice and movement for black, and specifically African, people. Although Thulani does not make a direct link to the transition from apartheid, Zanele does. Her statement strongly echoes a discourse of empowerment, derived from the historical transition from apartheid. Because South Africa's past is so strongly marked by intergroup conflict, the past and the transition from the past into the present is not the same type of discursive resource for each speaker. Different groups within society are differently

positioned in relation to the past, which may restrict their possibilities of using the transition as a resource in their talk.

Int: And what are the things that – for instance, Mandy – make you proud?

Mandy: Proud is, the way we came back from 1994, the way we stood up to the... everybody... and just became a united nation again.

Int: Is that something the rest of you share as well?

Marius: [very soft] yeah.

Int: Is that something that is very important for what South Africa is today? To understand South Africa today?

Marius: Yeah, I think, um, we should be proud on the way we, um, all the cultures form together, and living together, trying to live together in harmony. All the cultures, um, all mingled up.

Afrikaner female and male, Group 9, 2007

Note how pride in the transition is a somewhat problematic resource for speakers in this Afrikaner school. When Mandy is about to make explicit what and who was defeated with the 1994 transition, she clearly hesitates. Instead of mentioning the system of apartheid or her own Afrikaner community as the 'defeated party', she falls back on the neutral term 'everybody'. I will come back to these types of community-specific issues later in the chapter.

I argued in Chapter Two that narratives of national identity – or political nation-building projects – are constructing particular versions of the social relations between members of a national community. This includes the construction of versions of the past that position different national subgroups in a particular way. A common feature of societies that have emerged out of a civil war or conflict is that different subgroups hold on to very different versions of the truth about the past. As we have seen in Chapter Three, the first post-apartheid government of Mandela firmly promoted a reconciliatory approach to dealing with the apartheid past. This reconciliatory approach provided a particular kind of language for talking about the past. References to the past in the focus groups often resonate with this reconciliatory spirit. Much of the talk that 'others' the past – that draws a sharp boundary between the past and the present – is about how racial relations have improved since 1994.

Londi: And I think that South Africa has come a very long way...

Busi: From where it was.

Londi: Yeah, from where it was before, we've come a really long way.

Int: Yes, can you elaborate on that?

Londi: Yeah, well, I mean, from apartheid, to people, like we were even talking... like white people and black people are getting along, and now you can find us sitting next to white people and we're in the same schools... you wouldn't get that like, before. Yeah that's like, um... we've achieved a lot.

Ntombifuthi: And it feels like it never was ever there anyway.

Others: Yeah.

Ntombifuthi: The way we've come so far, from everything. We've done very well.

Fiona: I can't really imagine life without being associated like with other colours, like I can't imagine being in a white-only school, this is like... ever since we've been... [all talk at same time]... Yeah, it's weird like ever since we've been born we've been associated with everyone so... it's worked to our advantage.

Black females, English-speaking white female, Group 7, 2007

The past is so strongly equated with racism that those who are still racially prejudiced are commonly accused of 'being stuck in the past'. A related strategy is to attribute ongoing racial polarization and segregation to the older generation, the generation of the parents, who grew up in the apartheid past. As described elsewhere in this dissertation, studies have shown that the youth carries the burden of expectation of being the generation who will live out the narrative, who will be 'the vehicle by which the country fulfils the dream of a truly non-racial state' (Eaton 2006:253). The speakers in my focus groups seem to be aware of that expectation, which could even be seen as an imperative. In the extract below, Nesira, an Indian female, is contributing to a discussion in Group 4 on the persistence of racial prejudice.

Nesira: No, some parents, I mean... they just... they see people as people. But there are some people that, I think... apartheid did a number with them. And, um... they haven't let go of the past. But I mean, like today's generation, when you are racist you're out, and it's not the 'in-thing', to be racist. I mean we all interact as individuals, and we accept and enjoy each other's company as people.

Indian female, Group 4, 2007

### **Future: new patriotism**

In addition to a reconciliatory approach to the past, an important element of the post-apartheid nation-building project was a strong focus on the future. After all, while the number of possible narratives of the past was restricted, the future lay wide open as a site for different ideological projects. The reconciliatory approach not only had a function with regard to the past; it was seen by its political proponents as the ultimate precondition for South Africans to move into a collective future. As Verdoolaege (2008:145) writes: 'The reconciliation oriented truth, developed by the TRC, was in fact directed towards the present and the future'. Nelson Mandela's rhetoric of 'new patriotism', discussed in Chapter Three, was another clear manifestation of such a future orientation. The tone of this rhetoric was one of optimism, of potential, an invitation to work together to continue to make South Africa a better place. Joining the cause to build the young nation and develop its future potential was not only a pragmatic necessity but became a rhetorical resource for national commitment or pride. In the focus groups, many of the discussions on the South African nation and South Africanness breathe this ethos of new patriotism. What is noteworthy about many of these accounts is that they have an imperative tone – Mandela's call to 'roll up the sleeves to start building the country' did not fall onto deaf ears. Speakers were often found pleading for a pro-active attitude of South Africans towards their nation:

Thulani: [...] And... you know, I ask myself, what am I going to do for the country? And I've decided, OK, just gonna do this, and I'm not going to leave the country like most qualified people are, they leave the country instead of helping the country to develop. But they're leaving the country to upgrade other countries... they're more...mostly...upgraded, but they gonna add on to that. But leaving their country at home. You know, charity begins at home. So we should stay here, and try to change. We are here to change. The country won't change itself. We are here to change the country.

Black male, Group 4, 2007

Together with the themes of unity in diversity, non-racialism and reconciliation, I coded utterances building on new patriotism as part of the 'Rainbow repertoire'.

As we have seen in Chapter Three, the Rainbow repertoire is not only about political values. From the start, the post-apartheid governments have also promoted the idea of a shared culture of 'South Africanness' through activities in the field of sports and leisure. In my analysis, I considered these types of resources to also be part of the Rainbow repertoire. In response to Question 2, we see speakers use these types of resources to draw non-racial, non-ethnic boundaries around an inclusive, united South African 'Us'.

Frequently used resources are: a specific way of talking English, braaiing meat (cooking meat on an open fire), having an outdoor lifestyle and a certain style in music and fashion. A shared South Africanness was also constructed through attitudinal qualifications such as friendliness, openness, respect and humour.

Int: We were talking about general things that make you proud about South Africa and, um... what I was thinking of is also: is there a South African culture? Does that exist? If so, what is like the most important aspect of that?

Mahindra: It's the language we speak. The language, um... We have a special way of talking. It's a, um... kind of slang [others laugh]. If any person goes to anywhere in South Africa and you meet up with someone, you would not greet with 'hello', or 'how are you', it's more of 'howzit'?

Int: I've heard that, yes, I'm trying to learn that too.

Mahindra: And um... for the things we do... we just bond... I think we bond with it because the culture is just taking over. Like if you see a braai or – it is a barbeque stand – people having a party or something, you see people of all races and you just invite your neighbour, you invite your friends, so we all [...] that situation and we all just become part of...of one diverse culture as such. There are no races.

Int: So things like the braai, is that something that all South Africans share?

Group: Yes! *Wors...*!

Mahindra: When the braai-stand comes out everyone is equal, everyone is the same race, the same culture and all...

Zanele: Even in the townships, you find people braaiing Friday, Saturday night, and stuff... it's all...

[All talk at the same time].

Indian male, black female, Group 4, 2007

### **Ideological aim of Rainbow talk: inclusion**

From this first thematic analysis, I conclude that the dominant repertoire that feeds into speakers' talk about the internal dimensions of South African national identity is that of unity in diversity, non-racialism, reconciliation and new patriotism. In the remainder of the chapter, I will refer to talk that is informed by this repertoire as 'Rainbow Talk'. This type of talk directly reflects the political Rainbow discourse, which, as we have seen in Chapter Three, is informed by both multicultural and civic nationalist ideologies. Before moving on, let us look back for a moment on what type of political project it is that the Rainbow ideology is promoting. The Rainbow ideology was explicitly formulated as an

inclusive discourse, countering the exclusive ideologies on South African nationhood that had marked the past. The discourse achieved this by transforming diversity from an obstacle into a source of strength, making it a defining character that all South Africans share. At the same time, the ideology of non-racialism was aimed at eradicating racial dividing lines and making race irrelevant as a factor in public life. The Rainbow ideology is thus all about inclusion. In the analysis it became clear that it fulfils the same function for ordinary speakers: it offers a version of the nation in which all speakers are safely included. Rainbow talk accomplishes inclusion on two different levels: that of the immediate social context of the focus group as well as the broader, macro-social level of relations between different groups in society.

In the empirical analysis another intriguing feature of the Rainbow repertoire came to the surface. What emerged clearly from the analysis is that this identity is to a large extent *prospective*: it is a story of the type of nation that South Africa wishes to be. It is the type of nation that South Africa – according to these young people – is in the process of becoming, but that it not yet is. As was discussed in Chapter Three, racial prejudice, social segregation, material inequality – everything the Rainbow repertoire wishes to counter – are pervasive in contemporary South Africa. In the public domain, debates about the authenticity of different South African subgroups are far from settled. There is thus an unmistakable gap, or dilemma, between the prospective identity and everyday reality. In their accounts, participants are struggling to make sense of this gap. Participants are navigating between the dominant, Rainbow Image and counter-images of a nation that is still divided and unequal. Furthermore, although the Rainbow repertoire is the dominant way of talking about South Africa, this does not mean that its content is unproblematic and uncontested. The different sub-themes and elements of the narrative can be given multiple meanings. As we have seen in Chapter Three, there are internal contradictions within the narrative, between the narrative and competing identity discourses, and between the narrative and experiences of everyday reality. Speakers have to deal with these contradictions as they are finding their way through the discursive space of South African national identity. In the second part of the analysis I will focus on those instances where people diverge from the dominant Rainbow repertoire. It is those instances where the narrative is contested that turned out to be of the greatest analytical interest. In particular, I will look at the ways in which those diverging statements are articulated within the immediate context of the conversation. In this analysis it becomes clear that the Rainbow repertoire is more than just commonsensical: it is also imperative. This latter quality particularly reveals itself when we look at how speakers are carefully negotiating these diverging meanings within the conversational context.

## Variations in context and across different groups

For the second part of my empirical analysis, I compared the degree to which Rainbow talk featured in the individual groups, the different functions 'Rainbow talk' fulfilled in each immediate conversational context and how divergence from the three themes was negotiated by particular speakers in particular groups.

Taking the analysis to this next level also implies differentiating the talk along the lines of intersectionality. In Chapter Two, I suggested that intersectionality within a discursive approach is about acknowledging that people who are differently positioned within society have different identity discourses or repertoires at their disposal. Translated to my analysis, it implies examining national identity claims in relation to additional identity repertoires of specific (groups of) speakers. The additional identity repertoires that emerged as particularly important from the analysis were those related to racialized identity categories.

The first observation is that although the Rainbow nation repertoire was reproduced in each of the focus groups, it was most pronounced in the Indian South African group and in the groups with a racially mixed composition. The three groups in which Rainbow talk featured the least (Groups 2, 9 and 10) were all composed of speakers of the same racial background (one composed of black Africans and two of white Afrikaners). If we think about the primary function that Rainbow talk is fulfilling – of safeguarding broad multicultural inclusion in the South African national community – this pattern is not surprising. The Indian and mixed groups each contained an important number of participants that belong to 'racial' minority groups. Within social psychology, studies have pointed out that members of ethnic minorities endorse multiculturalism more strongly than members of the majority, because the former have more to gain from multiculturalism (see e.g. Verkuyten 2005:123). Following this assumption, we could expect speakers from a racial minority background to have a stake in reproducing the Rainbow Nation ideology. Through the Rainbow repertoire, a version of South Africa is constructed in which their place is not being questioned. However, this would not explain why the Rainbow repertoire featured less strongly in the two Afrikaner groups (each consisting only of members of a racial minority).

In addition to these macro-social aspects, I suspect that there is another process at work: Rainbow talk has an important function in the immediate conversational setting, particularly when the direct audience consists of people from different 'racial' backgrounds. The Rainbow repertoire provides a non-confrontational, face-saving way of

talking about the new South Africa. It is a safe kind of language, void of polarizing themes, allowing South Africans of different backgrounds to talk about their national identity together, and to construct an inclusive 'Us'. It is a safe kind of language and it is also imperative – deviating from it is counter-normative. This function becomes particularly clear when we look at how people negotiate a deviation from the narrative. In my analysis, I considered deviation from the Rainbow repertoire to be talk that contradicts one or several of its subthemes, often through the use of counter-themes such as racial division, a lack of unity, inequality, exclusion. I also included talk that contradicts the new patriotism repertoire, the repertoire of an optimistic future orientation. What the examples that follow also demonstrate is how collective, commonsensical repertoires about the nation are reproduced in locally specific ways, 'remade' by individuals who bring in alternative, competing identity repertoires and strategic interests.

### **Talk about affirmative action: managing an ideological dilemma**

One of the most frequent topics in the context of which people deviate from the Rainbow repertoire is the topic of transformation: of matching the political changes of the transition with socio-economic policies addressing racialized inequities. The topic constitutes what Billig et al. (1988) have termed an 'ideological dilemma': between the ambitions of non-racialism and equality on the one hand, and a policy that operates on the basis of racialized distinctions on the other. Different studies have pointed out that South Africans from minority backgrounds – whether white, Indian or coloured – by and large oppose affirmative action measures (Durrheim 2010). For those South Africans of a non-black background, who experience a more general sense of anxiety and displacement in the new South Africa, affirmative action becomes the concrete, identifiable culprit for their sense of exclusion. As Steyn writes in her study on narratives of whites in post-apartheid South Africa: 'It [*affirmative action*] is the lightning rod that catches feelings of grievance' (Steyn 2001:73). A pervasive commonsensical repertoire about affirmative action often deployed by minority South Africans is that it is a continuation of institutionalized inequality or even racism, albeit with roles reversed.

In my study, the interest is not so much in these feelings as such, as in the ways in which they are (or are not) articulated during the course of a conversation about South African nationhood. The ways in which the dilemma posed by affirmative action was negotiated was influenced by the racial background of the speaker in question, as well as the composition of the focus group. This analysis illustrates the argument that Rainbow talk serves to maintain good social relations and harmony in the immediate context of a



mixed group setting. We will see that slightly different norms appear to govern conversations about 'South Africanness' in mixed versus non-mixed groups.

Let us have a look at how the topic is introduced in Group 4, a mixed group composed of Indian and black participants. The tone of the discussion about Questions 1 and 2 up until this point had been very strongly Rainbow-oriented. Talika (Indian), Mahindra (Indian), Zanele (black) and Thulani (black) were dominating the discussion. Thematically, the image of South Africa they constructed was of an exceptionalist country in Africa (Mahindra), a successful example of unity in diversity (Talika) and a country that has achieved freedom and new opportunities for black people (Thulani and Zanele). Thulani had just made a strong 'New Patriotic' statement, arguing that South Africans should not emigrate but instead stay and contribute to their country. It is at this moment in the conversation that Nesira, an Indian female who had not spoken up much until then brings in her point on affirmative action:

Nesira: Now I, as a South African, I am proud because, um... to be a witness to the fact that how everybody is together. I mean it warms your heart when you see people interacting and when you can look across the street and just smile at somebody for the first time and they're returning the smile to you. And we owe that to one man which is Nelson Mandela, and he's a man that is honoured across the world, he's seen as the icon of peace. And to know that he gave his life so that we, so that the future South Africans, could live as a free nation, so that we could bond, so that we could learn and so that we could interact with each other. It's amazing. But I disagree when it comes to the fact where people always say that you're going overseas and work and to add on to that country, I believe that if you are taken care of in your own country, you wouldn't need to seek work elsewhere. For example in our country, um... I'm not trying to sound racist... um, but we have something called affirmative action. And our president stated in his [inaudible] speech addressing the nation that affirmative action is only to be carried out the first ten years after we were liberated, that is from 1994. We are walking thirteen years in democracy, and we're still seeing affirmative action in place. I believe that if you are qualified you should get the job. I believe that nothing else should be influencing you and your position in this country. And when people go out... elsewhere to seek work, they're given that opportunity. Because why? They are treated equal. And yes, we have equality now, but do we have equality everywhere? I mean in the past, there were races that were underprivileged, or there were races that were set aback because of their sk...skin colour. But how is it different today? By you enforcing something like affirmative action, what are you telling me? Because I'm not African. I'm South African, but I'm not an African by race. And by you telling me: 'You can't get this job because you're not the right skin colour', you're telling me there's no future for you here, what are you doing in this town?'

Indian female, Group 4, 2007

In this long statement, Nesira is making a number of noteworthy rhetorical moves. Firstly, she is aware that the point she is about to make is controversial, and deviates from the Rainbow and new patriotic repertoires the group has been jointly producing. She therefore attempts to find a way to articulate the contradiction she perceives between the Rainbow repertoire and sentiments of exclusion without disrupting the social harmony in the focus group too much.

On a broader macro-social level, she seems to be aware of the different way in which affirmative action measures might be perceived by black South Africans. She also manifests knowledge of the fact that in the public debate, critique on affirmative action might be interpreted as a lack of commitment to the new South Africa and to transformation or, ultimately, as racism. This explains why she starts her contribution with a lengthy introduction in which she repeats the Rainbow qualities of the new South Africa, specifically praising the racial reconciliation achieved. The function of this talk is to position her clearly as a Rainbow-minded, patriotic South African. Only after having positioned herself this way does she start to formulate her point of critique. Her awareness that opposition to affirmative action is sometimes interpreted as racism is evident in her use of the well-known disclaimer, *'I'm not trying to sound racist'*. In all this, we see Nesira carefully attuning her account to both the immediate audience (particularly the two black participants) and to larger virtual, non-present audiences. Rhetorically, Nesira's main point is to rebut the argument that South Africans who emigrate are not patriotic – a point not explicitly made but certainly implied by Thulani. In defending those who emigrate because of affirmative action, Nesira seems to be speaking up for those in her own community who feel excluded. The fact that affirmative action policies are also benefitting the Indian community to a certain degree is no reason for this speaker to align herself with proponents of the policies.

Nesira justifies her opposition to affirmative action ideologically through the repertoire of 'merit instead of representation', emphasizing that people should be employed on the basis of their individual qualities. Through this repertoire the issue is individualized and the explicit mentioning of racial groups is avoided. In the last segment, however, she does make race and skin colour very explicit. In the end her account becomes very personalized, explicitly formulating her own sense of exclusion. In the end, Nesira constructs the opposite of a Rainbow South Africa. Her South Africa is a nation in which certain groups of people – including her own – do not belong because of the colour of their skin. She even suggests these excluded South Africans will be treated much better in other countries. However, while the message is strong, her way of talking shows how she

carefully negotiates bringing in her point, all the while considering her audience. By 'dressing up' her point with a long Rainbow-informed introduction, she attempts to diminish the confrontational impact of her statement. It seems that her most immediate concern is to manage her relations with Thulani, who is the most direct interlocutor in this exchange.

If we compare this to the way in which the same topic – opposition to affirmative action – was introduced in the all Afrikaner Group 9, the differences are evident. The discussion below followed on the same question about what makes South Africa unique. The tone up until this point had been patriotic and Rainbow-minded. Mandy has just argued that she is proud of the transition to democracy in 1994.

Int: Is that [the transition] something that is very important for what South Africa is today? To understand South Africa today?

Marius: Yeah, I think, um, we should be proud on the way we, um, all the cultures form together, and living together, trying to live together in harmony. All the cultures, um, all mingled up.

Elsie: But, I have to say about that, um, I've, one thing that I don't really like is, we were four years old when it was 1994. We were all four years old. And we didn't have anything to do with apartheid. One day when we have to go to work we're going to suffer under it a bit.

Conrad: Yeah.

Elsie: I don't know it in English but it is like 'regstellende aksie'.

Int: Yeah, affirmative action.

Elsie: Yeah, and that's just, uh... we had nothing to do with that.

Conrad: I think that affirmative action on its own is almost like racism. 'Cause you're already pulling the other race, as you can say, before the other race. Just to get them back up. And that's racism on its own.

Marius: I think sports is a good example 'cause the government is trying to implement a non-racial, um, lifestyle, to live without racism and all that, and then there's a quota-stelsel in sport that says that there's a certain part of the team that must be black. Then, that's racism; what is it then?

Afrikaner males, Afrikaner females, Group 9, 2007

In a group such as this one, where the immediate audience consists of members of the same minority group and the (white) interviewer, bringing up the topic requires less careful negotiation. There are no delicate multicultural relations to manage in this

conversation. Elsie introduces the topic in a fairly direct manner, and instantly links it to the question of historical responsibility for the apartheid past. Her immediately defensive attitude indicates a consideration of the ways in which her own subnational group is closely associated with responsibility for the injustices of the apartheid past (Steyn 2004:147). Even before bringing up the subject of affirmative action, Elsie gets ahead of the argument that she sees coming, namely that it is a rightful policy to correct historical injustices originating from the apartheid era. With her statement that 'we had nothing to do with that', she is rebutting this argument even without it having been made in this conversation. Instead, she is joining in a debate that surrounds the theme of affirmative action in the public domain, in front of a virtual audience. In rebutting the invisible argument, she draws on the repertoire of apartheid being something of the past, and the unfairness of holding the youth responsible for something that happened 'before their time'. This is very similar to the strategies Klandermans, Werner and Van Doorn (2008) found in their conversations with young white South Africans on the subject of collective guilt. They found that those speakers who denied feelings of collective guilt and opposed affirmative action either denied personal blame, claiming that the perpetrators were not part of the category of 'Us', or argued that apartheid was something from the past. Durrheim and co-authors (2011) write that a common strategy of the 'born free' is to disassociate oneself from the past. A step further from mere disassociation is to respond in an aggressive and hostile manner to probes about the apartheid past, as Jansen writes:

There is among the [Afrikaner] children, as with their parents, a feeling of being targeted, that blacks, having got what they wanted in terms of power, still want to harass whites into yielding more. Already, quotas favour blacks in jobs and sports, why then continue to rant and rave against those newly dispossessed? (Jansen 2009:68).

In the extract above, Conrad and Marius eagerly take up the point brought up by Elsie, and complete the argument by suggesting that affirmative action constitutes 'racism in reverse'. Having constructed affirmative action this way, it takes a small step to argue that policies of non-racialism and affirmative action are in contradiction. Note how Marius talks about the ideal of non-racialism as a 'policy' 'they' (the government) want to implement, rather than a building block of his own national identity, as Rainbow talk would have it. Later in the chapter I will return to the specific ways in which Afrikaner participants talk about the past.

This said, it is an oversimplification to suggest a binary opposition between black proponents and minority group opponents of affirmative action. In Group 8, a group with six black girls and one English-speaking white girl, the conversation about affirmative action unfolds as follows:

Lihle: I think people are still voting for freedom fighters. It's still: 'Oh, these people gave us freedom, we owe them so much.' I think some of these freedom fighters that we vote for are not educated at all. And we need to think carefully before we vote for someone. It mustn't be just because a person's black, I'm gonna vote for him, and keep him in power. I think we must think more broadly. Think of what's best for the country. Not because you owe someone something. I think we must start forgetting the past and apartheid and that they brought us freedom. Yes, we owe a lot to them because they gave us freedom, but I think we must think of other things. We mustn't just think, 'Oh, this person gave me freedom, I must vote for him'. Yeah, all the time. Like ANC, the party that's in charge of us right now, I think we must stop voting for the freedom fighters, we must vote for someone who's gonna develop our country.

Int: And you're saying regardless of colour as well?

Lihle: Yes.

Int: So you're also saying affirmative action is... should come to an end now?

Lihle: Yes, I think so.

Mpho: Time has passed for that.

Int: Yes?

Mpho: The time has passed for that. We don't need that anymore. You know...

Int: You as... young you know, young participants on the labour market now, very soon, or – well, you have university of course first – you don't think you want to have that system in place?

*[Several: Yeah]*

Alison: It just confuses me because I don't see... like Nondumiso and everyone... I don't see them as... below me [laughs]. I don't think 'haha, she's black, she's not... well, clever, or whatever, 'cause... they're like... much cleverer than I am, and if [all laugh] and if they deserve the job then they should get it, but if I deserve it then I should get it.

Mpho: *Ja*, that's true.

Alison: I don't... I don't even understand how they can... think that I'm better than them or... they're better than me... 'cause we've gone to the same school, we've had the same teachers, it's like... just... it's confusing.

Lihle: People shouldn't be appointed just because of the colour of their skin. I think everyone should be... Like the job thing, that's why white people are going, 'cause people... black people are getting the jobs. I think you should be given the job because of your qualifications, not... *[Mpho: not your colour]*, of who you are. Yes.

Alison: And we weren't even alive during apartheid, I mean, we were like three when it ended, so it's not like we were the ones that started it, so... In a way, I don't think we should be... like some white people are getting punished for it. I hope that doesn't offend anyone but... like, with jobs and stuff, there are white people that are better qualified, but they don't get the job. But it's not like they... were around during apartheid. I mean when you're three, you can't really...

Mpho: Do anything, yeah...

Alison: ...You don't even realize that this is going on. You just... you think that's how life is.

Lihle: We must stop living in the past. People are still hung up in apartheid. Or we were... we had all this mistrust, this... 'oh, we were treated badly', yeah, but I think we have to move on.

African females, English-speaking white female, Group 8, 2008

In this case, Lihle clearly sets the tone. She formulates a broader argument against what could be regarded as an uncritical, struggle-based solidarity. In doing this, she seems to be addressing her own community as primary audience, telling them that they must stop living in the past. Despite being on the beneficiary side of affirmative action, Lihle firmly positions herself as an opponent. Possibly the composition of the focus group and more generally the composition of the school – evenly divided into white and black learners – is part of the reason for this. Studies have suggested that black South Africans who interact frequently with whites show lower levels of support for race-targeted redress policies (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux 2007). Lihle's arguments find approval with several of the other speakers. This paves the way for the only white speaker in the group, Alison, to join in. Presumably encouraged by the tone of the discussion, her contribution echoes the familiar points made by Nesira and Elsie. However, Alison is seen to be duly considering her audience, complimenting the intelligence of her African school mates along the way.<sup>46</sup>

### **Another matter of contestation: crime**

Another topic that is a common site for deviation from the Rainbow narrative is that of crime. Like affirmative action, crime is an issue full of controversies. In the public debate, speaking out about crime has been equated with a lack of patriotism or – in the case of a non-black speaker – with racism. At the moment of the 2007 focus groups, it was still fresh in the collective mind how in 2006 the then Minister of Safety and Security Nqakula had labelled South Africans who 'whinged about crime' unpatriotic (*The Guardian* 21.06.2006). The extract below is from the discussion in Group 1 that followed on the

<sup>46</sup> Her fellow group members of black African background ignore Alison's controversial suggestion that affirmative action would have to with (a lack of) intelligence instead of historical disadvantage, possibly for the sake of keeping the harmony in the group.

question of what makes South Africa unique. Bryan, a white English-speaking male, carefully manoeuvres to bring across his point about crime (and AIDS):

Bryan: Um, the point I'm gonna say now is not a very positive point but... like still a point that gives us uniqueness, it separates us from other countries, is if you actually look at our violence rates and the AIDS rates, that also differentiates us from other countries. It's not a good point that everybody should be happy about, but it's still a point that separates us.

Shanice: That makes people notice us more.

Bryan: Mmm... In a bad way.

Lungile: In a bad way, yeah.

Int: Yes. Because some of the groups I talked to were quite negative about the image that South Africa has in the world. But some were very positive, so... how do you guys feel about that?

Bryan: No, no, people underestimate South Africa, like that Rugby World Cup, people underestimate South Africa. They think everything is bad about South Africa and that's the... that's what I've heard from people that's come from overseas and... 'cause I've met quite a bit of people that's come from overseas. And they always say that the way that people use to talk over in that place about South Africa is that it's a bad place, or anything. And then when something like that happens, everyone would shock, shock, and everyone would...

Mandla: I disagree.

Int: You disagree?

Mandla: Yeah, because if you look at the past five years, how many artists from around the country has actually come to South Africa to do concerts and... and stuff. Because like, um... one, they want one... and two, they want to like see all the different elements and like stuff... Because for example Alexandra is a..., I think a bird sanctuary... because of all the diverse birds which like... nest here. And because of all that and because, um... South African fans, South African fans are quite supportive, like to their artists and they follow them and look up to them and stuff. And they come and support them. If they have a concert, you find like people get like sold out, even if you're from locally or abroad. And that's what like encourages people to come here. And especially because of the 2010, people like are encouraged to come here. And if... if the negatives of South Africa overcame the positives of South Africa, I don't think we would have won the 2010 World Cup. So I think that for every single country in the world, there are negatives, for example, America the pollution etc. But it's us making them... negligible compared to the positives of the country. That makes it... that makes us like, one of the best countries in the world. Probably the best country in the world.

In this stretch of talk, Bryan is bringing up two topics – crime and AIDS – that sit uncomfortably with the image of South Africa as a successful, harmonious and pride-instilling Rainbow nation. But when I – in my position as the interviewer – link his comments to the possible negative image of South Africa in the world, Bryan immediately backs out of his initial critical notes. This indicates the strong normativity of the Rainbow nation narrative and of expressing pride that was characteristic of this group. It also shows Bryan's awareness of the potential link made between complaints about crime and a lack of patriotism. In his response he drops the entire issue of crime to focus on rebutting the alleged negative image of South Africa. Mandla then breaks in briskly with a long, outspokenly patriotic monologue, giving short shrift to any negative image of South Africa that was about to be constructed by Bryan (and Shanice). In the next example from the same group, we see Bryan again attempting to bring his concerns about crime into the conversation. In the first utterance of the extract, Shanice replies to the question of what South Africans have in common:

Shanice: We've got respect, basically, for other people and their things. South Africans. There's a certain way. Like if you come from America and you come to say like one of our houses...

Lindiwe: Yes...

Shanice: ...And you know, parents will make you feel at home. Like you're at home. Not like you... you must sit and just sit and you mustn't move! You feel at home and be free and do what you want to do. What you do in your home.

Int: You [Bryan] disagree?

Bryan: Yes, in a way I disagree against Shanice's point and that, because I mean, you do get places where, for instance for like me, I don't know if it's changed and that, but in the past it used to be like that. For me, since I'm a white guy and that. Like if I had to walk into a place like, either like Edendale or Imbali or something, which consists of black people only, if I had to walk into a place like that just by myself, there's about a 99% chance I'm either gonna get stabbed, I'm gonna get hijacked, I'm gonna get killed. And if a woman, even if a woman's walking night time, she... there's a major chance that she can be raped. I'm not just saying it's happening with black people, it's happening with white people as well. People jump to conclusions too quickly.

Int: I see a disagreement on the other side?

Lindiwe: Not these days. There will be some people who'd be, like, 'OK, what are you doing?'

Bryan: Yes.

Lindiwe: Because of [...] because [...] of the crime.



Bryan: Yeah, that's what I mean. 'Cause you get some people that are very like racist and that, I mean, I mean, knowing, since I'm a white person I know a bunch of white people and that and I mean, more of the older people there that still lived in the apartheid days, now they... they can't get used to the... what it's like nowadays. Where white people get along with black people and that. You still get those racialistic people. But I mean like, for me, I'm the... I've been to, I come to Alex, and that, and I get along with black people very well. I mean, they... they... I even got a Zulu name and everything. [laughs] It's just... it's just the way I am, I mean, I'm not a racist person.

'Coloured' female, white English-speaking male, black female, Group 1, 2007

In this extract, Bryan is going a step further in his deviation from the Rainbow narrative by giving a racialized twist to his point about crime. Durrheim and co-authors (2011: 54) mention the existence of a 'racialized discourse of crime' that 'not only misrepresents whites as the predominant victims, but conversely portrays blacks as the primary perpetrators'. Jansen suggests that crime is often perceived not simply as 'an attack on everybody, black and white; no, crimes are examples of volksmoorde (ethnic murders), a deliberate targeting of whites' (Jansen 2009:69).

At first glance, Bryan indeed seems to be arguing that as a white person, he would automatically be targeted when going into Pietermaritzburg's townships. We can, however, already sense his ambivalence when he says: 'I'm not saying it's happening with black people, it's happening with white people as well.' Lindiwe then counters his point, suggesting that the situation in the townships has changed for the better. Even though Lindiwe stays far from linking Bryan's remarks to racism, Bryan feels pressed against the wall. In response to Lindiwe, he goes completely off his initial subject, switching to the – seemingly unrelated – subject of white people who are stuck in the apartheid past. But upon closer analysis, this makes sense: mindful of the argument in the public debate that whites who complain about crime are racist, Bryan is at pains to position himself as a non-racist.

### **Not a Rainbow nation, but an African nation**

A group in which deviation from the Rainbow narrative was remarkably common is Group 2, the other group in 'Model-C' school A. This group was composed of black Africans only. From the very start, there was a tendency in this group to draw racialized boundaries between black and non-black communities. This is clear in the following extract:

Int: Now you know that I'm not from South Africa, um, what would you say... how would you explain to me what is the unique character of South Africa?

Nombuso: Beautiful. It's just beautiful. Our values are different than other country, or continents...

Int: Your values?

Nombuso: Our values. And we live by them, we stand by them, and, I think, no other country can take our values away from us.

Int: Can you give an example of a value that you're thinking of?

Nombuso: Our freedom and our people. Like families. You can never... like... in the... can I say this... white communities... like in other countries... you get people that... for example old age home, when the parents are old, you take them to these places. Here in South Africa, we live with our old people, we stay with them, because we know where we come from. They used to feed us, they used to take care of us. So what's the use of taking that mother figure to you away to another person that you really don't know. So, yeah, I mean...

Black female, Group 2, 2007

In this extract, the speaker initially seems to be talking about an inclusive South African 'Us', but in her third utterance this becomes confused: the values she describes as typically South African are asserted against the values 'of white communities'. At the same time, her choice of words reflects a sense of ambivalence. The words '*can I say this*' and '*like in other countries*' indicate her own difficulty with in- or excluding the South African white community in the construction of South African values. Elsewhere in the conversation, we see other speakers drawing strict racialized boundaries between communities:

Bongani: I don't think we have an identity as South Africans yet.

Int: OK... What makes you say that?

Bongani: The only identity we have is... apartheid. The only thing that links everyone... is apartheid, Mandela, that's it. Yeah. The only thing that... now, the recent thing is probably the World Cup. But the bigger... if you look at the bigger picture, it's just Mandela, that's, like, the only thing that I mean, that everyone links to.

Int: OK, so how do you see then... because that's, that's a negative aspect of diversity can be that you can never reach that common identity, that shared identity...

Bongani: Some people... OK, like from my personal experience, some people like my brother, like my family, we have white friends, we have Indian friends, we have coloured friends. And... to think about it... people actually separate themselves on purpose. Black people will separate themselves... and white people will separate themselves... because like to give an example: black peoples do not like Indians. Durban is full of Indians [*others: yes*]. You go to a place, you see all these Indians, and you go to another place, you see blacks only.

Black male, Group 2, 2007

In this extract, Bongani is first of all contradicting the Rainbow theme of unity in diversity, suggesting that South Africans in fact have very little in common. In his second utterance – after being primed somewhat by the interviewer – he paints a picture of racialized boundaries still being very entrenched. In this particular stretch of talk he seems to present his own family as an exception to the rule of racial segregation, but elsewhere in the conversation Bongani himself expresses clearly derogatory stereotypes about Indians. If we reverse the multiculturalism hypothesis referred to above, we would expect speakers of a racial majority background to be more inclined to promote assimilationist ideologies. Deviation from the Rainbow repertoire could, in this case, have to do with speakers promoting the main alternative to Rainbow narrative, namely, Africanism. As we saw in Chapter Three, Africanism in the Mbeki era is about the ‘assertion of African hegemony in the context of a multicultural society’. This discourse indeed seems to dominate the discussion in Group 2. Let us look at the extract below, in which the outspoken Nombuso again takes the lead. The extract follows on a conversation about the power struggle between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma and its divisive effects on the black African community (particularly between the Zulu and Xhosa).

Nombuso: [...] This, this is our land. We have been given back this land [...] as black people. If we are for example, like trying to push each other away, maybe those white people, they will see a gap and take it and they will come back. They’re not gone. People think they’re gone, they’re not gone. They’re just sitting back and watching us destroy ourselves.

Int: And that’s how you... yes, you think that they’re waiting for... something to fall apart?

Nombuso: Oh, they’re waiting. They’re waiting, I’m telling you.

Int: But they, they don’t want the country to become united, stable?

Nombuso: No, no, no, no, they want the country to be stable and ‘blablabla’, but... leading... they want to be there. Like this BEE, they don’t like it. They don’t like it at all. Because it’s empowering us, black people. And I think, and I think... if they did not empower our parents back then, who is going to empower us now?

Because they don't, they don't want to do anything. Like my cousin, an accountant, she was not working for one full year, because they were giving them pressure because she's black, and she's a woman, that actually counts as a big thing, so, she was not working for a year, she was like, working in those restaurants and stuff, because those white people, who are in accounting, they would not want to hire them. They were giving them hard time and stuff so that they could like, be discouraged and stuff. Even doctors too. They still give them a hard time. Being a doctor and be black, still a big thing, still a big...

Int: You're raising a lot of interesting issues, um, but if we look back at you know the national character of South Africa, what do these things tell you about that?

Nombuso: We're not united.

Int: You're not united?

Nombuso: Some more than others. I think the older people are not united. I think the older people...

Int: Older people?

Nombuso: Older people are still saying: 'You did something to me and I will never forgive you for that'.

Black female, Group 2, 2007

In this extract the image of a Rainbow nation is torn up in an unsparing manner. First thing to note is the explicit use of the terms 'Us' (black community) and 'Them' (white community). Nombuso's version of South Africa is that of a nation divided into two polarized groups. Secondly, Nombuso questions white entitlement to South African land, suggesting – in line with exclusivist versions of Africanism – that South Africa belongs to black people alone. She breaks down the entire notion of racial reconciliation with her suggestion that white people are simply waiting for their chance to get back in power. In the end of the extract she explicitly deviates from the 'master narrative of reconciliation' by stressing the continuation of historical antagonism and the difficulty of forgiveness for the older generation.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the theme of affirmative action is given the exact opposite meaning in this group in comparison to the examples discussed above. For Nombuso, the need for fundamental transformation is, without question, more concretely the need for black empowerment in general and on the labour market in particular, through affirmative action measures.

On the other hand, when this group talks about white people, it is not *always* in polarizing terms. This becomes clear when the group talks about Bryan. Bryan, the participant in Group 1, is one of the very few white learners in School A. In this position, he seems to have such a visibility that he is a point of reference even in his absence. Group 2 also spontaneously brings him up:

Nombuso: Like here in this school, there's this guy called Bryan, we all know him. He understands...

Int: He was here in the group yesterday.

Nombuso: He understands everything. I like that guy. He's a nice example. And his name is [mentions a Zulu name], we call him [Zulu name].

Int: Yeah, he's got a Zulu name, he told me.

Nombuso: He does not feel weird or different. He's white.

Bongani: We're just the same.

Nombuso: We love him. If we could ever say that [Zulu name X] who is like disrespectful... or that he don't like black people... whoever says that... please, they got a problem.

Int: OK, you got... I mean that's an example in your own school, that might influence how you see other white people, does it? If you see him, and he's totally sort of open to other cultures and integrated. Is that like a positive, sort of standard-setting example?

Dumisani: He's a standard.

Gugu: It is.

Dumisani: If one can do that why can't they all?

Gugu: That's the thing, because it sometimes makes me angry, I mean he did it, why can't the others do it, because he has proven that it is not impossible.

Black females, black male, Group 2, 2007

What comes through in this discussion is that Bryan is an acceptable type of white person, because he is adapting to the black African culture in the school – he has learnt isiZulu, adopted a Zulu name, and is generally seen as being very open and respectful to the majority culture in the school. In all this, he is the opposite of the stereotypical racist white, the white that does not like black people. Bryan is seen as an exception to the rule.

The way in which he is discussed is reminiscent of the 'honorary white' phenomenon,<sup>47</sup> but this time in reverse. Durrheim and co-authors refer to the 'honorary white' phenomenon in the context of black people being perceived as exceptions to the rule of stereotypical blackness by their white peers, because they are clean, educated, civilised and so on (Durrheim et al. 2011:33). Through the construction of Bryan as an 'honorary black' who integrates with or even assimilates to the majority black African culture in the school, the group makes the broader political point for an Africanist society. In another stretch of talk in Group 2 it is so called 'coloured' people who are positively evaluated by the group, because 'they behave like black people'. Below, Dumisani and Bheka are disagreeing with Nombuso, who had remarked that – similar to white and Indian people – some 'coloured' people feel superior to black African people.

Int: Tell me why you disagree. What are your thoughts about this?

Dumisani: Because I have... well, some of my family's members are coloureds. So, I don't think that it's true 'cause I've been to a community where mostly coloureds... and they're not so different from us blacks, so, and they know that... so... I don't think it is true [murmurs, inaudible].

Int: Other side of the table, any responses?

Bheka: I agree with him. Coloureds are like... cool.

Int: Cool?

Bheka: Yeah, cool. Because they're like... they speak Zulu too. They also speak Zulu and they're like... they're half black... yeah. I used to stay with coloureds, you see, when you're with them... it's like they're black, you're black, they're coloured, you're coloured, because you speak one language... it's nice. But arghh, yeah, not all of them. Like, you see, if you're like, if you're an outsider, and you come to them...

Black males, Group 2, 2007

Similar to the extract discussed above, the ideology of assimilationism is echoed in this extract: (members of) other groups are positively evaluated when they are assimilating to the majority black African culture. At first instance, it seems puzzling that Group 2 stands out so clearly as the only group in which the repertoire of Africanism was widely reproduced. In Groups 5 and 6 – two black African-only groups in the township school – it was virtually absent. Upon second thought, I realized that what was at play here was

<sup>47</sup> 'Honorary whites' is a term that was used by the apartheid regime to grant almost all of the rights and privileges of whites to certain favoured non-white groups.

another highly salient debate for speakers of a black African background: the debate about the meaning of authentic blackness or Africanness.

### **Authentic blackness**

Durrheim and co-authors (2011:43) refer to the debate about authentic blackness in their recent publication, discussing the multiplicity of subject positions available to black people and the requirement to account for the kind of black person that you are. The accusation of ‘not being black enough’ always lurks around the corner. That this is a highly relevant debate for ordinary young black South Africans shows in the prominent way it featured in each group with a majority of black speakers.

We saw that for speakers of a minority background, the question of South African national identity involves questions of belonging and inclusion, and the Rainbow narrative offered an answer to these questions. Speakers of a black African background are equally concerned with questions of inclusion, but they seem to have another type of challenge to confront: that of belonging to the black community. The pattern emerging from the transcripts is that for black speakers, intra-racial social relations occupy a prime place and the own racial community is the primary audience to address when positioning oneself and one’s identity. In Group 6 – all black learners in this township school – the question ‘what do all South Africans share’ triggered a discussion about the loss of traditional, African cultures. At first instance, the group is talking about South Africans in general, and youth specifically, who are primarily interested in fashion and forget about their cultures. In the second instance, one of the speakers, Mike specifies that he is talking about young black Africans who attend so called ‘Model-C’ or private schools. Mike’s comments indicate that the idea of these schools as bastions of privilege and whiteness (see Chapter Four) is still alive in the commonsensical talk of black Africans. Before this stretch of talk, the group had been discussing how young South Africans are losing their culture because of their interest in fashion.

Zodidi: They’re into fashion.

Mike: Not most of them!

Zodidi: Not most of them but... a few.

Mike: Those few then, it’s depends though, ‘cause you look at it like those girls from those high schools, the cheese girls and cheese boys... [laughs].

Int: Which schools?

Zodidi: Like... let’s take [School A], but not actually, but most girls...

Mike: Private schools.

Int: Private schools, yes.

Zodidi: ... they're into fashion and all that stuff.

Int: OK, and they forgot about their culture?

Zodidi: Most of them, yeah.

Mike: And they've sort of like developed this accent, when they speak English, it's like her.

Int: Oh her? You come from a school like that?

Precious: No, I used to go to [School X] when I was still in Grade 6. Up to Grade 8.

Int: OK, the accent, they speak in a different way?

Mike, Jabulani: Yes.

Zodidi: Even though it's... even if it's not necessary, they'll speak English, even if it's us, like blacks here, and they'll be continuing speaking English, even though there's no reason, 'cause they can all understand Zulu, why is there a reason for me to speak English?

Black males, black females, Group 6, 2007

What is implied in this type of talk is that through their use of English, the African kids that attend private schools position themselves outside of the traditional, authentic African community. For their part, black participants in Model-C schools demonstrate full awareness of the ways in which they are being positioned by other people within the black community. For these learners, talk about language, and more specifically the medium of tuition in the school, is closely intertwined with questions of black African identity.

Int: Would anyone of you want to go to a school where you are taught in your own language?

Busi: I wouldn't, I wouldn't. I don't think I'd go for... 'cause...

Mpumelelo: Like I mean, you would go there, but then... I don't think you'd understand half the words that they say. Because even though you grow up like around people like black people, like African people speaking Zulu, but then, I mean, for instance me as an example, I speak Zulu at home, but then I speak Zulu mixed with English. Reason for me: I don't understand some of the Zulu words that they say. I'd actually sit down and say, 'What does that mean now?' And then they'd say: 'No, it means this and this and this,' and then I say 'Oh, OK, now I understand.' And for some...for other people it looks as if, like, I maybe, like, less of a black person because they think: 'Then why are you black and then you don't speak the language?'



Int: Somebody has said that to you or...?

Londi: Yes.

Mpumelelo: Yes, they ask me things like, 'Now why are you so white?' Like as if I'm like white-influenced, like I'm black, but then I'm just like... not black enough. Because I don't speak the language as fluently as everybody else.

Black females, Group 7, 2007

Even though the two groups here are not in dialogue with one another, they are each taking opposite sides in a broader debate. What is at stake in the debate is what constitutes a true black person, and speaking an African language properly comes up as a key criterion. Those who do not risk being labelled 'cheese boys', 'cheese girls' or 'coconuts'. Obviously, there is also a class dimension at work here. Authenticity becomes the trump card of the lower socio-economic classes, while middle class black South Africans are 'trading their culture' for upward mobility. The girls in Group 7 – and of School D in general – seem to acquiesce in the fact that they are positioned this way. Their conversation is dominated by a cosmopolitan adaptation of the Rainbow repertoire, a project in which racialized identity categories such as 'black' do not have a place anyway. By contrast, the participants in Group 2 in School A, the other Model C school, are at pains to position their school as 'black', and to reject the label of coconut:

Int: OK, so in this school, you learn a lot about other cultures?

All: Yes.

Bongani: [School A] made me black.

Int: [School A] made you? Now you have to explain that one to me!

Gugu: He was a coconut.

Bongani: When I came I was like this... [points to the cookies]

Int: Like a white-chocolate cookie?

Bongani: Yeah. They said that I'm a cheeseboy.

Black male, black female, Group 2, 2007

Later in the conversation, I confronted this group directly with the comments made by the township learners about their school:

Int: OK, because I'm interested in this changing... you had to adopt more of a black identity, right. Now some schools I've been to, I mean, they might say that... you know any of the schools in town... because they wanna be English and they're not speaking properly Zulu anymore... and the learners in those schools have lost their black identity, or their Zulu identity. I have heard that because I've been to one of the township schools, that's why.

Nombuso: No, they'll say that about us. I am sure.

Dumisani: Obviously they say that.

Gugu: Obviously they would say that.

Nombuso: Like they're saying that you're not supposed to wear your jeans as a girl... the girl... a girl in the Zulu culture and in the Xhosa culture is not supposed to wear pants. Not supposed to wear pants. And then when you come like in your family and you go there wearing pants, my mother goes, the moment you walk into the door: 'Please go wear a skirt, please.' I don't argue with her. No, it's my roots, take off my pants and wear my skirt. It's her rules. And... by saying that is being African or like... being... adopting white... like he was saying you adopted being black, I think... it does not mean that we, if we go to those whiter schools, it's because we want to be white. We're trying to get an education. We're trying to be better... it's not that.

Black females, black male, Group 2, 2007

Now that we have looked into the 'authentic blackness' debate, we might be better able to understand why an Africanist narrative on the South African nation featured so strongly in Group 2. It is plausible that in their talk about the South African nation, the speakers first and foremost addressed an audience of fellow black South Africans. Both with the immediate audience present *and* with the broader, virtual black audience, the primary issue at stake was not so much a reconciliatory Rainbow narrative but being positioned as an authentic African. The Africanist narrative and the clear demarcation of racialized (non-classed) boundaries around the black African community served that particular project. This is a clear example of how the construction of national identity intersects with dominant subgroup identity repertoires.

### **Being Afrikaner in the new South Africa**

The other two groups in which strong intra-national racialized boundaries between 'Us' and 'Them' were drawn were Groups 9 and 10, the two groups entirely composed of Afrikaner speakers. The work of Melissa Steyn (2001, 2004) documents the circulation of different discourses among whites in general and Afrikaners specifically. Although questions of belonging are complex for all white South Africans, Steyn (2004) suggests that Afrikaners in particular are undergoing a profound existentialist crisis. Jansen in a

similar vein writes, 'Nowhere is this sense of defeat more palpably felt than among the majority (60 percent) of whites, the group called Afrikaners' (2009:31). This sense of crisis or defeat, Steyn argues, results from the change in status from a group in power to a peripheral minority group, the collapse of old conditions of identification and the stigma that comes from being associated with the apartheid system. There is 'certainly an element of shame and guilt – of disgrace – that attaches to the social positioning of the Afrikaner' (Steyn 2004:148). Steyn argues that Afrikaners experience a stronger anxiety about their identity than white English-speaking South Africans, who can still hold on to an 'international ideological centre' (Steyn 2004:150). Similarly, Jansen stresses that unlike English-speaking whites, Afrikaners have no dual citizenship, no alternative homeland to flee to when things get too rough in South Africa. Instead, they are determined to stay put in South Africa whatever the cost may be, for 'this is the land on which they have established their past, and on which they will make their future' (Jansen 2009: 32). Afrikaners thus experience a dilemmatic sense of being deeply rooted in and feeling alienated from the country at the same time. As a result, Steyn argues that what she calls 'Afrikaner white talk' contains more discursive intensity than that of English-speaking whites (2004:153). Add to this the fact that Afrikaners experience an additional sense of threat in the province of KwaZulu-Natal – being so clearly in a minority position within the white community – and the picture is complete.

What came out very clearly in the thematic analysis of Group 9 is indeed a strong sense of having to defend their own Afrikaner identity and culture. Although the Rainbow repertoire is being reproduced by this group, it is a specific, *qualified* version of the Rainbow repertoire: it is combined with defensive, protectionist rhetoric about the own culture. Yes, cultural diversity is the defining feature of the new South Africa, as the Rainbow repertoire suggests. But it is precisely the interpretation warned about by critical scholars (for instance Alexander 2003) that serves the discursive project of these learners: an image of separate, deterministic strands of different cultures, with no room for integration or hybridization. At best, the type of Rainbow nation these speakers promote is what Pumla-Gqola (in Nuttall 2000:6) has aptly termed a 'Rainbowism of polite proximities'. In the extract below, Marius replies to the question of what South Africa will look like fifteen years from now. In his reply he emphasizes that the different cultures should not be forced to integrate:

Int: You're saying it's changing at a too fast pace now?

Marius: I think so. Yeah. I think so. The cultures got thrown together too quickly and that's... that's why there's conflict because no one understands each other; it all just happened too quickly.

Afrikaner male, Group 9, 2007

There is an interesting parallel here with the arguments heard in the township school that equally emphasized the importance of preserving and being firmly rooted in one's ethnic culture. Elements of the Rainbow repertoire that symbolize a truly shared South Africanness are given a radically different meaning in Group 9, and become a resource for drawing racialized boundaries. In the extract below, the speakers discuss the role of the Constitution, and human rights protection in general, in representing the new South Africa:

Mandy: I wouldn't say it's [the Constitution] not important. It just brings a negative side to South Africa because...

Conrad: 'Cause that whole image is...

Mandy: ... it's like crime and abuse and...

Conrad: Yeah, I think it symbolizes blackness...

Int: Really?

Marius: Yeah, because the government that forms the human rights... they are trying to create a life, easier for their own people and they don't... they are not trying to make it easier for all of us.

Conrad: Yeah, I think they're only thinking of themselves.

Marius: They base this... this human rights... they base it on the life of their own culture, and they only focus on their own culture, and they're trying to form the rights according to their own people, and to make life easier for their own people.

Conrad: Although they are like the biggest race but they're still just concentrating on their own, on themselves.

Afrikaner female, Afrikaner males, Group 9, 2007

A number of things are noteworthy here. The most obvious of these are the clear distinctions between Us and Them in the words 'they', 'their own people', 'their own culture', 'the biggest race' and so on: the group is clearly setting up black South Africans as a category of people separate from themselves. But what is even more interesting is

how they use the Constitution – a widely known symbol of the new South Africa which is part of the Rainbow framework – as a source of division. They construct the Constitution as a symbol that represents one group only – and very negatively. It is being abused by that one group to the detriment of the other group (the Afrikaner community).

The undercurrent of the discussion in this group is a clear sense of being at risk, and of experiencing loss: typical ingredients of Afrikaner discourse in the post-apartheid dispensation. Much of the discussion in Group 9 echoes one of the discourses Steyn found, namely that of whiteness – and more specifically Afrikanerdom – as besieged, insulted, victimized and robbed of its powers (2001:65). This is accompanied by a repertoire about the importance of a strong, unified and protected Afrikaner culture as a wall of protection for the unsettling, if not outright hostile, outside world.

Elsie: I just want them to respect the fact that this is all that we have left. And if they take that away then it's...

Int: But are you pessimistic about the future then? That it's going to disappear? Are you afraid that your culture is going to disappear? 15 years from now?

Elsie: Definitely not the culture, because I won't, I won't let it disappear, the Afrikaners ourselves, I don't think we will let it disappear. But it's like schools and functions and Afrikaans things... that can disappear because the government can just take that away. But they can't keep me from speaking Afrikaans in my house.

Afrikaner female, Group 9, 2007

In Group 10, we also see strategies of withdrawal into the own Afrikaner community:

Int: I just wanted to quickly talk about how important it is to have a sense of national identity, for you, um... I'd like to talk a bit more about how important it is for you personally. Is it something that you cherish, or not really a big deal for you?

Peter: Well, for me, my national identity is the most important thing for me. I'd like to be Afrikaans and I'd like everyone around me to be Afrikaans. I don't... I'm not... nothing against other cultures, but... they should leave me and my Afrikaans alone. They shouldn't try to stop it or force something down on me.

Int: But when you say my national identity, the primary thing would be the Afrikaans...?

Peter: My Afrikaans, yeah. Because... like I can't say I'm Afrikaans, um... I can say I'm a German-Afrikaans. Because Afrikaners are mixed, we are French, we are Spanish, we're German, we're Dutch, we're English... we're everything. We're also a mixed culture.

That's why... we can't really do anything really together because we all can't work together because we're different nationalities actually. But we're Afrikaans, and that's the main thing for me. We're Afrikaans and that's what binds us.

Int: OK, you're referring to the Afrikaner nation. But when we're talking about the South African nation, and that identity, is that important to have?

Peter: Well... they buggered up my national identity in South Africa.

Afrikaner male, Group 10, 2007

Note how Peter instantly takes on an ethnic, narrow definition of national identity, referring to the Afrikaner nation. Only when pressed does he address the subject of a transcending South African national identity. But he immediately denounces its importance, using a polarizing 'they' to imply all non-Afrikaner others. His response breathes an attitude of indifference to or even disengagement with broader South African society. It is clear that Peter does not want much to do with 'them', suggesting 'they should leave him and his Afrikaans alone'.

Interestingly, Group 9 does not avoid introspection: several speakers reflect on why they think their own Afrikaner community is resisting change. However, instead of a critical evaluation of their own group, this leads to a confirmation of (racist) stereotypes about other groups. The extract below echoes the kind of talk that Steyn found, lamenting a loss of the things white people 'have worked so hard for' (Steyn 2001:73).

Conrad: I think the Afrikaans people are scared of change and they're scared of adapting to new situations. And... they want to lose... I don't think they want to change what they've been working on so hard. And they've done so much for this country, and now every... and now it's just getting thrown away.

Elsie: Yes, because Afrikaans people are hard-working people.

Conrad: Yeah.

Elsie: If they do something you know, than they give it all and they work hard and... so in Pietermaritzburg, say, some of the buildings or something they've worked on really hard and now they feel just other people's coming and just breaking it down. Everything they worked on. Because other cultures aren't always that hard working as others, so it's more, like... social people... and like free type of people, and they just, don't really care about certain stuff that we would care about.

Afrikaner male, Afrikaner female, Group 9, 2007

For these particular learners, perceptions of being a group at risk are not just fed by the change in power relations at the national level, but also by more immediate perceptions of threat from the local situation in Pietermaritzburg. Compared to other parts of South Africa, the Afrikaner community is small in KwaZulu-Natal and the use of the Afrikaans language is limited. School E is the only secondary school in Pietermaritzburg that still uses Afrikaans as a primary medium of instruction. The school faces decreasing enrolment numbers, to such an extent that the school management has decided to open up parts of the building to English-speaking learners. Some of the learners in the focus group brought up this concrete issue to give weight to their narrative of victimhood.

Elsie: I don't know how true it is, but I've heard rumours about that we in our school, we have a lot of classrooms, lots of place, and we don't have enough Afrikaans children to fill those places now, the government wants to put English-speaking people into our school to make the classrooms full, 'cause there are black kids without a place in school. They're wanting to put them in here. Now I don't have a problem with school being multicoloured because I was in a primary school like that. There are schools like that in Pietermaritzburg, I wouldn't, it would be no problem for me to be in such a school, but our [School E] is the only Afrikaans school in Pietermaritzburg. It's the only bit Afrikaans that we have left, is our school. And I would be, personally, I would be devastated if they had to change the school. Just because it's [School E]... I wouldn't like it if there was being English people, or people, put into our school because it's the only bit we have left. We do everything the Afrikaner way here, we still have like the dance... [inaudible]. It's still *Soekie* and *Langarm* and we do Afrikaans things... and it would just be, if they put other cultures in here the last of Afrikaans in Pietermaritzburg would just be destroyed.

Afrikaner female, Group 9, 2007

Note how Elsie manoeuvres to avoid the impression that her resistance to change is based on racist motivations. Instead, she uses the trope of the importance of a preservation of culture to legitimize her position. Loss of the language is symbolic for the broader loss of the identity of one's own group.

From what we have seen so far, the debate in the Afrikaner groups might seem one-dimensional, as if speakers were unanimously formulating the familiar repertoire of Afrikaner victimhood. This was not the case. Because of the homogeneous composition of these groups, the groups indeed manifested less of the careful negotiations we have seen in the other groups. Nevertheless, it was clear throughout the discussions in Groups 9 and 10 that the participants in these groups were not fully indifferent to broader, non-present audiences. For instance, speakers frequently formulated non-racist disclaimers, indicating awareness of either the public stereotype of the Afrikaner as racist or the international injunction against openly expressed prejudice (Steyn and Foster 2008:28). Furthermore,

the ways in which speakers positioned themselves in their talk were not singular, but multiple and dynamic. This indicated the ongoing struggle to redefine old or discredited identities, to adapt to different contexts and to reconcile conflicting identity projects. To illustrate this, we will look at a few statements by Lourie in Group 10. During the discussion, Lourie predominantly presents himself as a new-age South African and 'new Afrikaner': an Afrikaner who wholeheartedly embraces the new dispensation. In the extract below, he comments on a discussion about the place of traditional Afrikaner customs in a fictitious museum about the new South Africa, on the basis of a postcard circulated by the interviewer:<sup>48</sup>

Int: How do you feel, Lourie, about this? You've been quiet for a while...

Lourie: The thing is, um... I'm... personally, I'm a new-age South African. I can't say that I can look at that picture and see something that I can associate with. I do believe South Africans... you must remember something about South Africans, is that they are very diverse... even the white Afrikaans-speaking are very diverse. I mean we've got Afrikaans-speaking, English-speaking, and we've got Dutch and German influences. It is a very... and to unite the culture is very difficult. So... I would, personally I wouldn't put that there because I can't see how that unites us. Because I would... if I wanted to build a museum I would... want to show how we were united. Because that is what we are. Is, um... South Africans, especially the Afrikaans-speaking people have had human rights wars for... not just between the blacks and the whites, but between the English and Afrikaans-speaking, and between all the different... and that has happened a lot of the times.

Afrikaner male, Group 10, 2007

Lourie constructs his own culture very differently from the previous speakers. He trivializes the unity and coherence of the own group. Paradoxically, while he argues that it is the diversity that hinders the unity of the Afrikaner community, his overall project is to emphasize the unity of the South African community. He uses an unexpected resource to construct a sense of collective South African identity, namely that of internal wars between different South African communities. In a later extract, he makes this point more explicitly:

<sup>48</sup> In the 2007 focus groups, one element in the discussion was a fictitious museum about South Africa that group members were asked to fill up. I brought ten postcards to the group that each featured an image that could be regarded as 'typically South African', for instance a picture of Mandela, of popular South African bands, of South African sportsmen, of the different subcultures most relevant to the focus groups (Indian, Zulu, Afrikaner) and so on. The group members were asked to select the three postcards that represented the things that would, in their view, certainly deserve a place in the museum. The exercise did not generate the richest discussions in the 2007 groups and is therefore not taken up as a separate, explicit part of the analysis here.



Lourie: Yeah, and I think, I think just the... I think the way we present ourselves is much different from a lot of other countries. We don't come over very arrogant. We're very humble people. I think, it might be because... you know, we all... all sometime in our life we had a bit of a struggle. You know if it was a political struggle, or it was, um... you know just to survive in South Africa sometimes does... does get hard, you know to be a farmer with little water or something like that. So I think we're all... I don't say... want to say... share that hardship, but that sort of also unites us. Because we all... we all come from different situations, but we all live in this country, and to live in this country you have to be a certain type of person. You can't... there's not any type of person that can easily [inaudible] survive in South Africa. You have to be a hardworking, like I said, motivated type of person... Even between the black people, you will see, the people who really have a success in South Africa, it's not necessarily white people or Indian people, it's all kinds of people. And why? Because they've got that certain type of characteristic... characteristics that define them from [inaudible]... and that is... that is how I see South Africans.

Int: So you're saying struggles on different levels?

Lourie: Yes.

Int: For some it's a political struggle, for others it was more like an economical...

Lourie: Economical, yes. But we all share it. We all... I mean...

Int: You all share that you had some struggles?

Lourie: Yes.

Int: Even though some of the struggles were putting two groups against one another?

Lourie: Yes. But I mean we were all part of it. All... or at least we know the history of it. I mean we were all part of the apartheid struggle. I mean, we also... we as white South Africans, we also had problems with when you had, um... I mean we also had bomb attacks and things that happened to us. So, I mean, obviously I'm not from that era, but I'm just saying if you look at grown up South Africans, you know, um... they all resemble that same type of characteristics. They all know each other, coming from different situations. And they all know each other's situations.

Afrikaner male, Group 10, 2007

In this extract we see a good example of the selective interpretation of history to serve a particular national project. The historical events of colonialism, Anglo-Boer warfare and apartheid are re-interpreted from sources of division to resources for constructing similarity amongst all South Africans. When probed for clarification by the interviewer, Lourie backtracks a little. In his last utterance, he takes a bit more distance – shifting from the pronoun 'we' to 'them', and falling back on the proven strategy of disconnecting his

own generation from the apartheid history. All in all, the image Lourie presents of South Africa is of a nation that is constantly changing, adapting and learning. Through unconventional rhetorical strategies, he manages to construct an image of South Africa in which there is a place for him. This is in contrast with several others in Groups 9 and 10, who seem to have given up on an inclusive South Africa in which they all belong. This leads to a constant tension, an unsolved problem that overshadows their contribution to the debate and results in the often defensive, indignant tone.

As emphasized in Chapter Two, national identity is as much about the construction of a collective 'Us' as it is about the distinction from a non-national 'Them', or, more precisely, several non-national 'Thems'. Indeed, a very significant part of who we say we are is given substance through negative distinction from others. In this context I referred to Jenkins' notion of 'the internal and external dialectic of identification' (Jenkins 2008). Two types of social relations are central to national identity: those between fellow nationals within the national community, and those between the national community and the rest of the world. The first part of this chapter examined how speakers give expression to relations within the national community (what binds us, what divides us?). This type of talk primarily seemed to address domestic, internal audiences. A key concern for speakers in this domestically oriented talk was around questions of inclusion. Secondly, I found that domestically oriented, Rainbow talk served an immediate interest in the focus-group setting: that of not disrupting the social harmony in the group. In the last part of this chapter, I will examine the outward dimension of national identity construction: how do speakers position South Africa within a world of nation-states? Not surprisingly, in this process international audiences play a central role. A key concern is to hold up a favourable image of South Africa in front of these audiences.

## **International dimension: South Africa in the world**

### **Strong focus on South Africa's international image**

One of the most prominent patterns emerging from the first reading of the transcripts was the strong preoccupation of speakers across all focus groups with the ways in which South Africa is (perceived to be) positioned by 'others', by non-nationals. It is not unthinkable that such an international perspective was triggered by the ways in which Questions 1 and 2 were formulated (what makes your country unique and what do South Africans share). Nevertheless, I was struck by the fervour that accompanied discussions of this international image. Furthermore, the immediacy with which people adopted an internationally comparative perspective in their talk confirms the idea that national identity is directly tied up with a vision of a broader world system of nation-states (Billig

1995). Internationally oriented talk – asserting South African identity against that of other nations – fell apart in two categories. The first category contained talk that drew on international comparisons to construct a favourable, positive image of South Africa. Thematically, part of this talk built on the themes of the Rainbow repertoire. For instance, speakers would emphasize the distinction between South Africa and other nations in terms of the political freedoms obtained through the democratic transition, or in terms of the values and rights enshrined in the Constitution. In Chapter Three, it was argued that the transition to democracy firmly established South Africa's international image as a beacon of hope, a miracle nation: an image closely linked up with the figure of Nelson Mandela. Participants in the focus groups seemed well aware of the availability of this important symbolic resource:

Int: And what are the moments when you feel that [a strong sense of national belonging]? Are there certain events or occasions when that feeling is more strong than at other moments?

Talika: I think, um... if you maybe watch TV or anything, if you hear other countries talking about South Africa, the main thing they talk about is the freedom what we obtained. We overcame apartheid, we went through a lot of struggles and... especially when you hear about Nelson Mandela or other freedom fighters, when they honour them, that really makes you proud. To be part of South Africa. And, um... if you look at South Africa now we are quite developed. And from, if you look at us, if you did look at South Africa about twenty years, we were... we were into apartheid and we were totally the opposite what we are now. So to have overcome all of that, and to be where we are today, I think that's it.

Indian females, Group 3 2007

Zoma: It's, like, he's [Mandela] known everywhere and, like, respected by everyone in South Africa. And it's, like... it's, like, during this time, when he, like, became president, it's, like, the time South Africa became, like, one and becoming a Rainbow Nation. And it's, like, the different cultures were acknowledged instead of having, like, one, being the main one. Yes. And having, like, eleven different official languages and... yeah it's, like, it's different from any other country in the world because you won't find, like... so many different people in one area in South Africa.

Int: And has he also influenced the way people deal with each other?

Zoma: Yes, very much [*others talk simultaneously*].

Nondumiso: And the way the world deals with us, I think.

Black females, Group 8, 2007

This type of talk fits perfectly into the overall Rainbow repertoire discussed earlier in the chapter. The successful transition to democracy is presented as a defining element of South Africa's identity that is asserted against the 'Other' of the apartheid past. The transition to democracy heralded an era of international connections after decades of isolation. This is another theme that speakers built on to position their nation favourably:

Dumisani: More on the positive side, I think we share the idea that we've been through a certain stage that was really negative for South Africa... and then, now we're in the positive light, like, in general, for the world to see us as a better place now than in the past.

Int: But, um... there might be people in society who feel, um... the past was more positive for them. Or you think that everyone sort of shares the feeling that...

Dumisani: Well, I think that, um, when those things were happening, like, back then, the apartheid and stuff, the world, like, in general, people, like, in the US and in the other big countries, power countries, they wouldn't, they wouldn't involve themselves with us, like, South Africa. But now we get to also do stuff with them and mix ourselves with them so, yeah, it's a positive thing for South Africa.

Black male, Group 2, 2007

Throughout the transcripts, we see speakers making flexible use of international comparisons in order to serve their discursive projects. The nations with which South Africa is compared can easily shift, as can the criteria for comparison. While South Africa's political achievements serve to distinguish the country from the rest of Africa, contrasting South Africa to countries in the north (North America, Europe) is often done on the grounds of natural beauty and quality of life.

Thulani: I would think that South Africa is a beautiful country. That's one... is the one that stands out in the world. You know with all our resources, minerals, etc, things that you would find here in South Africa, the Big Five in the Kruger National Park, Cape Point, where you see the clash of the two seas, that's special, that's something that you really need to see. Having to know that the Atlantic is cold, the Indian is warm... you know, is joined to that. How does the... how the water changed there. You know it's something that you want to go witness yourself. You know, it will bring more people to the country. And I would see... I see South Africa as one of the natural wonders of the world. You know.

Black male, Group 4, 2007

In this example, Thulani uses an international comparison to give substance to his own, affectionate qualifications of the country: the function of the talk is fairly straightforward. In terms of analysis, it was the second category of outwardly oriented talk that was most

interesting, because it signalled the complex dialogical dimension of positioning. In this talk, participants were attending to the ways in which they believed people in other nations look at South Africa.<sup>49</sup> In six of the ten focus groups in 2007, participants spontaneously brought up the negative international image they believe South Africa has. This type of talk often had a defensive tone, suggesting that the 'false image' that 'others' have is in need of correction. With this talk, speakers attend to a virtual international audience<sup>50</sup> in an attempt to alter the identity imposed by that audience.

### **Ambassador talk**

The idea that South Africa has a negative international image contradicts the positive, Rainbow-fitting representations in the extracts above. Speakers are struggling with this contradiction. Within the same conversation, descriptions of South Africa's international image would often shift from positive to negative and back. But rather than a mere sign of inconsistency, this is indicative of the complex dialectic between self-chosen and ascribed identities, as well as of the ambivalences in the relationship between the own national community and 'significant Others'. Speakers have a fair degree of agency in constructing an image of their nation, but they also have to orient themselves towards the image of their nation in the eyes of those significant Others. To complicate matters, the 'gaze' of the Other is not one-dimensional, but likely to contain both positive and negative evaluations.

Bongani: Well, first thing that I like about South Africa, is that you know how, when you watch TV and they portray us or they view us as a poor country. As... a country that needs help from other countries. A country that... is lacking in resources, in education, finance and everything. Like, it's really easy for me to view a thing, like, negatively, like, you get this glass and you'd say it's half empty. OK, that how other countries, namely, like, America and some other people, they look at our country as half empty. I don't view our country as half empty. Because, when we living, the places around in South Africa, we got the most beautifulist landscapes, the most beautifulist seas, we've got the most beautifulist people, cultures and... We have education, we have resources, we have finances. We just need a way to... like, highlight it...

Nombuso: Amplify it...

Bongani: Yeah, and apply all the knowledge that we have on those things. So South Africa is a very... it's got potential. It's got... it's a place with potential and we just need to... to work on ourselves to enhance that potential, to its maximum.

Black male, black female, Group 2, 2007

<sup>49</sup> Social psychologists refer to this phenomenon as 'meta-stereotyping'; eg. Vorauer (1998)

<sup>50</sup> Of course, the moderator directly represented such an international audience for the speakers.

It is important to note that Bongani mentions 'America', or people in America, as the 'Other' that is believed to hold a negative view of South Africa. Throughout the dataset, speakers persistently oriented towards what North America and European countries – or in short 'the West' – think of South Africa. This is coupled with an apparent disregard for the opinions of neighbouring African countries. It is clear that for my participants, the significant 'Other' in relation to which South Africa's identity is asserted is 'the West'. Furthermore, Bongani uses the topic of the negative image to bring across his message of new patriotism: South Africa needs to believe in and work on its own potential. By giving his statement this particular twist he seems to be turning again to domestic audiences. We can see this happening in many places across the transcripts. The perception of a negative international image spurs a domestically oriented imperative: South Africans must help to spread a positive image of their nation; they must act like 'ambassadors' of their nation. I gave these types of accounts the code 'ambassadorship'. In one case the term ambassador was literally used:

Int: How important is it, you feel, for South Africans to have a strong feeling of national identity? Is it important for the country? What do you think about, when you think about national identity?

Shanice: I would say for us, it's important for us to be proudly South African, because most people, as we were saying, only think negative things about South Africa, and for a person to be proudly South African would give someone else a different mindset about South Africa and a different way to judge South Africa.

Int: Mmm... Anyone else?

Lungile: Yeah, we have to be ambassadors. If we go out of South Africa, people must say: 'OK, South Africa is quite a good country,' you know, 'I mean, a person like that comes from there.' They mustn't say: 'Oh well, he's from South Africa, we understand...' Yeah.

Mandla: And we still have to continue with whatever we are doing, because whatever we are doing is good and it's working for us and we have this uniqueness about us, compared to a whole what... 100 and something countries in the world. If you say South Africa, immediately people think of Nelson Mandela, they think of winning the World Cup, they think of the movie... the Oscar Tsotsi, they think of MTV Awards and all, we have that attachment of success... succeeding. It's only those [badly audible] envy our country that only think of, like, the crime rates.

'Coloured' female, black males, Group 1, 2007

When we analyze these ambassador statements in the broader context of a conversational interaction, we will see that their occurrence is often not arbitrary. The function of ambassador talk is often to rebut other discourses relevant to the

conversation. With their ambassador talk, speakers are either directly responding to other speakers in the conversation, or they are positioning themselves in relation to the perceived negative image held by absent international audiences.

### **Neo-colonialism and exceptionalism**

In the extract below, Mahindra is equally turning to a domestic audience at the end of his statement. He suggests that the negative international image has a backlash effect on South African's self image. Assessed in this light, his first utterance appears as more of an inwardly oriented motivational speech.

Int: How would you... what does it mean to you, a feeling of national identity? To have a strong sense of national identity?

Mahindra: I think one point is, we can definitely... I think everybody... I think the world knows that sometimes when people think of South Africa, they just look at it as a part of Africa. It's unimportant... it's, um... obviously maybe if you are in America or in Europe you'd say it's not developed, it's just another part of Africa that's underdeveloped and unimportant. But... these people don't realize, um... that South Africa is the giant of Africa. And basically we sometimes have to carry the burdens of the other countries as well. Because we do help the other countries quite a bit, like Zimbabwe. And we supply lots of international... lots of international countries' trade. Our natural resources are high: gold, diamonds. But people still look down on us, because of this being part of Africa, and this kind of generalization, that we're unimportant. Yet... we do so hard, we work so hard, to become the biggest in...

Int: Do you see South Africa as an exceptional country in Africa?

Mahindra: Definitely yes. South Africa... besides Egypt, I think, we have the greatest amount of natural resources. And um... everything happens in South Africa. I mean scientifically, we're well, although currently... I mean because the lack of job opportunities, people are leaving the country. But, um... if you look at universities and stuff, scientifically and mathematically, there's a lot of talent here which is leaving the country. Because I think people are unsure about their national identity. They don't think that South Africa can... live up to the standards of any international country. That's because... people are looking down on us.

Indian male, Group 4, 2007

Mahindra's contribution contains explicit references to a number of familiar ideological repertoires that are echoed elsewhere by other speakers. Firstly, he takes on the idea that economic progress is what matters in the world, and nations are evaluated on the basis of their achievements in this area. While doing this, he refers explicitly to the 'lens' through which the West is believed to be looking at Africa. Crucial in his first utterance is the sentence '*but people still look down on us, because of this being part of Africa*'.

With this sentence, Mahindra gives away that he is arguing against neo-colonial discourse about Africa as a continent of underdevelopment, coupled with the more recent discourse of Afro-pessimism. In this we can recognize the tone of the Mbeki government intent on countering negative Western stereotypes of Africa. Interestingly, Mahindra is not rebutting these discourses entirely. By emphasizing South Africa's economic strength and leadership role in the region, he is instead presenting his own country as atypical in an otherwise problem-fraught continent. He manoeuvres his country out of its unfortunate international image through the ideological repertoire of South African exceptionalism, made explicit through the question of the interviewer. This repertoire refers to the persistent conventional wisdom in both lay and academic circles that because of its history, South Africa is an exception to the rule of poverty, underdevelopment and warfare elsewhere on the African continent (Lazarus 2004). As a result, Mahindra is actually confirming Afro-pessimist images of the rest of Africa.

All this exemplifies the ambiguous position South Africa occupies within a framework of global power relations, in which it is representative of the periphery and centre at the same time. In comparison to the West, South Africa is commonly perceived as part of the periphery, whilst in comparison to the rest of Africa it has the image of a hegemonic, central power (Abedajo et al. 2007:104).

Primitive images of Africa, invariably and incorrectly applied to South Africa, were a concern for speakers in several focus groups:

Busi: [...] Also, like, most people, like, I always hear, like, people in the United States, they think South Africa is, like... we're living with animals...

Int: They still think that you live with animals?

Busi: And then they think we're wearing animal skins and all...

Other: Lions in our backyard... [All talk at the same time...]

Int: And that's different from your own idea of your country?

All: Yes.

Londi: We're normal.

Int: Lions don't feature in that image?

All: Nooooo!

Black females, Group 7, 2007



Note how Londi's remark '*we're normal*' again serves to confirm rather than rebut the neo-colonial repertoire, by suggesting that anything diverging from the road to progress, development and modernity is 'abnormal'. The function of this type of talk – or in any case, the effect – is to disassociate South Africa from Africa; and this is precisely where the difficulty lies. In Chapter Three, we saw that under the Mbeki presidency the political imperative became to root South African identity more firmly in the African continent. The discourse of exceptionalism stands in direct opposition to discourses on (pan-) Africanism and the African Renaissance. South Africa's self-chosen identity is struggling to balance between these different perspectives. The interviews echo this ambivalence, with speakers alternating between both types of discourses, depending on what serves their discursive project at a particular instance. However, my conclusion about the internationally oriented talk is that it is predominantly organized around the relationship between South Africa and the West as significant Other. This relationship is not straightforward but revolves around the ambivalent desire to resemble and to differentiate from that Other. Although lip service is paid to elements of an Africanist identity throughout the text, these elements mainly serve this broader identity project of asserting South Africa against its Western 'Other'.<sup>51</sup> 'African qualities' – in terms of natural environment, traditions, lifestyle – are typically brought up when speakers are differentiating South Africa from 'the West'. In the quote discussed above, Group 7 was passionately denying the relevance of wild animals to representations of South Africa. But only a few minutes later, Lindsay from the same group argues the exact opposite:

Lindsay: Yeah, I was just going to say that, it's also because it's a beautiful country, I think that a lot of, um... our, like, tourism, they come to see the beautiful scenery, the big five, the... you know, like, when Mpumelelo said, we're a very diverse country, so... like with all the animals and stuff, that's what people come to see. I don't think they really come because they want to... I mean we are friendly but I don't think their main objective is to come to South Africa because they're friendly people. [Others laugh]. I don't know, that's just what I feel, I think they come mainly because of the animals, because it's... the climate is so nice, it's lovely summers, there's... you know what I... I don't know... it's so... like, lively, other than... like, other places like...

Londi: England...

Lindsay: England and stuff. I get such negative connotations from what people say about it, because they say it's just... it's grey, it's hardly any sun, you're just inside all the time, and, to be honest, I would much rather be here and be outside and playing... and doing all sorts of things.

<sup>51</sup> As I suggested in Chapter Three, global power relations have shifted and on a political and economic level South Africa is developing new ties to other upcoming economies. It remains to be seen if and when this shift in geopolitical focus trickles down to the level of commonsensical discourse.

Int: But when earlier, you were saying that... or some of you were saying about these lions, and that it's just an idea that foreigners have. But you are saying that's what they come to see, but for you that's not the main defining characteristic.

Ntombifuthi: That's not the only thing about us; there's so much more than that.

Busi: They just think safari.

White English-speaking female, black females, Group 7, 2007

## Emigration

Descriptions of South Africa that emphasize 'African' features are very common in the context of talk about emigration. The theme of emigration – of an 'opt-out' possibility – is a salient topic in all the interviews, with the exception of the learners in the township school. Emigration is a controversial theme in itself in South African public debate (see for instance Gray, Delany and Durrheim 2005). Emigration can be ideologically justified through individualist arguments stressing the freedom to maximize one's individual opportunities. But in the South African public debate – in which a certain kind of patriotism is imperative – emigration is often associated with a lack of patriotism and commitment to the new South Africa. The theme of emigration exemplifies speakers' ambivalent attitude towards 'the West'. It commonly prompts positive comparisons of South Africa and affectionate expressions of national commitment. The speakers in Group 8 were remarkably critical of the alleged consumer culture and materialism in North America. As long as that culture has not yet firmly taken hold in South Africa, South Africa remains a preferable place to live.

Zoma: I wouldn't consider going to any other country. Like, I would stay here, like, for the rest of our life. I'd visit, but I'd never, like, permanently go away.

Int: What makes you so confident about that?

Zoma: It's because... it's, like... from what you see on the media and stuff, about other countries, like, if you go to America, it's all, like, based on fake [badly audible], people getting rich, and it's, like... like, money-based in most countries. It's, like, here... even if you don't have money, it's still, like, something great about it. It's not, like, 'money, money' in South Africa.

Xolani: Because of tradition.

Black females, Group 8, 2007

However, when asked about South Africa's future, the group agrees that the country is already on the road to losing its African values and becoming more like the USA.

Nondumiso: '*Ubuntu*', there's this term '*ubuntu*'. There won't be a lot of that. I won't consider Gugu when I want something. I won't look at... if she'll be affected or if she'll... no, if I want it, I go out there and get it. And it's already starting, I mean if you look at our generation, we all wanna be rich. We all wanna have a fancy car and live in Sandton, you know, all of that. And all of them they try... it's how we get there, that's the problem. I don't think it's going to be nice.

Black female, Group 8, 2007

Remarkably, the strongest promotion of an Africanist trajectory came from an unexpected side: from Group 10, the all Afrikaner group. This extract will be discussed here as the final example of the complex outward dimension of national identification. In the stretch of talk copied below, the group discusses the relevance of a card depicting the African continent for representing South Africa. I include a lengthy stretch of conversation, so that we can see the details of the interaction:

Int: The one [card] that says 'African', do anyone of you have any feelings about that?

Peter: Well, at the political status and the status of most of the African countries, I wouldn't like to be associated with the rest of Africa [laughs]. If you get the corruption in Nigeria... and, I don't know what to call it, what's going on in Zimbabwe... I don't know what to call it... [laughs].

Int: You all agree?

Group: Yes.

Int: OK, because there's sometimes... you can hear people arguing for... South African culture also to be more based on African values. You know, to have a stronger African culture in South Africa... Whatever that may mean.

Lourie: Yes, I think... definitely the Westernization of South Africa, um... has... has played a big role. Um... and... I... and I think the sort of the politician... stage we're at the moment... um... we're trying to get the two to merge together, and it's a bit like water and oil.

Int: Western and African?

Lourie: Western and African cultures because... um... I don't wanna say... um... but I actually... I wanna say that. Um... the rest of the world is thinking that... everything should be Western. It's a Western way of thinking. The world should just fit into that box. And I think Africa... Africa as a whole should... should unite and... just figure out what... what they wanna stand for. Because, um... we're slowly but certainly we're getting... we're getting taken over like... like Peter said... taken over by other... other cultures. And we're getting thrown around from one to the other. And we should not, um... we should stand our own ground, and decide what we are. And unite under... under that roof. I wanna say.

Peter: Also, um... why... Africa can't... really go Westernization, really do Westernization... is because, um... if you just look in South Africa, um... in our... um... the major group in South Africa is the Zulu's and they're 22% of the population. 20% of the population, that's nothing. It's not really, it's not that much if you look into Americans... they have, what?... 98% white... That's, you know... so against such... percentages... you can't... do one thing. Let's say... just look in South Africa, the diversity... what about the whole of Africa? That's why Western ideas won't be fit into Africa.

Lourie: Yes. And just to give you an idea about... for instance... the Zulu's have... as a... long history of... I won't say rape because that's not what they call it but they... thought... the men thought they had the right to... women. For instance. Now... this... this idea does not fit into Western...

Int: Of rape?

Lourie: Of rape, yes. This... this idea doesn't fit into Western culture. I mean... we think... I personally also believe it's the... worst thing ever. But now they have to... to actually change their way of thinking. So they're also losing a bit of their culture. Not necessarily a good part of their culture, but they are losing a part of their culture. And it's been... it's been happening to all South Africans. So... that's why I said it's a very difficult thing to comment on. Because... it's so rapidly changing... to be an African... means... you got a thousand jackets in the cupboard, and you're putting one on and the other one off the whole time.

Afrikaner males, Group 10, 2007

At first instance, the suggestion of an African dimension to South Africa's identity is promptly rejected by Peter on the basis of classic exceptionalist arguments. His characterization of 'the rest of Africa' as hopeless is initially met with agreement by the rest of the group. The explicit, derogatory disassociation from Africa that Peter formulates should be read in the light of his Afrikaner background and the discourses that have historically been dominant in that community. Most likely, the parents of these kids were brought up with the notion that everything that is African is inferior. The difference between Peter and speakers like Mahindra and Bongani lies in the historical roles of their communities during the periods of colonialism and apartheid. Instead of being positioned by colonial discourses, the Afrikaner community has been on the side of its authors.<sup>52</sup> Exceptionalism was the common perspective on South Africa's place in Africa throughout the days of apartheid, and exceptionalist discourses can be expected to be firmly entrenched in white Afrikaner common sense. Despite being part of the 'born free'

<sup>52</sup> It should be remembered that the Afrikaner community also has a history of representing itself as the colonized subjects of British imperialism.

generation, these young people are likely to be exposed to these types of discourses to a certain degree.

The most interesting part of the extract, however, begins when Lourie takes the floor. Earlier in the chapter we saw how he is positioning himself as a 'new-age Afrikaner'. First, he seems to be acknowledging the contribution of Western influences in South Africa. But from the next sentence on, his mission turns out to be a lot more complex. He suggests that Western and African cultures cannot go together – they're 'like water and oil'. With some hesitation – signalling the paradoxical plot that will follow – he goes on to critique the alleged Western global dominance, and makes a stand for a truly pan-Africanist cause. Along the way he refers to a point never made in this sense by Peter. In his turn, Peter goes along with Lourie somewhat by referring – implicitly – to the minority position of Western culture in Africa. The paradox of this discussion is that both Lourie and Peter consider themselves exponents of a – if not Western, than at least – a modern, rationalist, capitalist culture and have clearly positioned themselves as such elsewhere in the conversation. This, Lourie gives away in the last utterance when he discusses his take on the ways in which Zulus deal with the issue of rape, an 'idea' that 'does not fit into Western culture'. Suddenly, the pronouns 'we' and 'they' are brought in and Lourie draws a clear distinction between his personal, Western beliefs and 'their' African culture. In addition, his representation of Zulu culture echoes familiar colonial notions of Africans as 'savage', 'uncivilised'. In the final segment, he somehow seems to get lost in the complexity of his own argument but finds an escape in the generic point about the need to constantly change as Africans. The theme of adapting to change is the familiar resource we have seen him use before to construct an inclusive sense of South Africanness. What goes on in this extract in part has to do with the anxiety of white South Africans about their place in a South Africa that is perceived by some to be Africanizing. Lourie is evidently aware of the Africanist imperative in the political domain and embracing this imperative fits his self-chosen position as a new-age Afrikaner. A rejection of Western influences also fits in with the common strategy among Afrikaners to position themselves as 'indigenous to Africa,' thereby laying claim to a strong entitlement to be unequivocally included in the South African national community. At the same time, his progressive 'new-age' positioning derails along the way due to pervasive stereotypes about the African 'other'. At the end of his argument, Lourie gets caught in the middle of the incompatibility between Western and African cultures he himself set up at the outset.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the ways in which focus-group participants constructed their national identity discursively by drawing on shared, publicly available ideological repertoires. In this concluding section I will sum up the main findings.

### *Rainbow Talk dominates*

The first important finding of this chapter was the clear dominance of the Rainbow Nation repertoire as the main ideological repertoire underlying the national identity talk of my participants, specifically when it came to the internal construction of similarity within the South African national community. Across all focus groups, national identity talk was interspersed with the different themes of 'Rainbow Talk': unity in diversity, reconciliation, non-racialism, freedom and equality. The ideological perspectives formulated at a political level provide the content material for the meanings given to the themes of nation, people, time and place and the constructions of similarity and difference. The tropes of Rainbow Talk were used specifically to give meaning to characterizations of South Africans as people, to the values of the South African national community and to the ways in which South Africa is moving across time. In line with the notion of the action orientation of identity talk, I analyzed these Rainbow-informed claims for the work that they were doing, the functions they were fulfilling within different levels of context. What versions of the social world were promoted through these claims, and what could be the speaker's interest behind those versions? Additionally, at a more local, immediate level, what types of relations were being managed through these claims?

### *Rainbow Talk ensures inclusion*

At the level of the broader, macro-social context – the societal context beyond the immediate context of the conversation – I argued that the core function of Rainbow informed talk is inclusion or, to phrase it alternatively, to ensure belonging. Constructing the South African nation along the lines of the Rainbow repertoire is to construct a strongly inclusive South Africa, with boundary markers based on civic rather than ethnocultural or racial criteria. 'The South African people' in this version are not defined by their race, ethnicity or subgroup culture. The emphasis is on what South Africans across different races and cultures have in common. Constructing South Africa in this manner provided a way for speakers of all racial backgrounds to safeguard their own interest in being included within the South African nation. Phrased differently, the 'action orientation' of Rainbow-informed expressions of national identity is to ensure inclusion and belonging. Speakers ultimately strive to construct the national community as a place in which they belong, a place which includes them. While trying to accomplish this, they

are seen to be struggling with different processes or experiences of exclusion in their talk. If inclusion is the main interest of identity talk, exclusion is its natural, inevitable counterpart. It is this dual concern with in- and exclusion that forms a central undercurrent of the identity talk that I have collected in this study. Importantly, the ways in which this interest can be safeguarded is highly variable and contextually dependent. Depending on their position in society people are differently positioned vis-à-vis the discourse on the nation. Following the multiculturalism hypothesis (Verkuyten 2005), we would expect speakers from a minority background to be the most passionate proponents of the inclusive, multicultural Rainbow repertoire. Their place in South Africa, it could be argued, is less easily safeguarded in competing repertoires such as the ethnocultural, Africanist repertoire. For this assumption, however, no clear pattern of evidence was found in the interviews.

An asset of the Rainbow repertoire is that it allows for the expression of dual identities. By celebrating unity in diversity, the ideology leaves room for different subnational ethnic and cultural groups to preserve their distinctness whilst at the same time constructing an image of a cohesive, united national community. Rainbow Talk generally offers a straightforward way of dealing with the country's divisive past: the national identity it constructs is clearly asserted against that past, and the focus is unquestioningly directed at a united and optimistic future.

*Rainbow Talk offers a non-confrontational language*

At the level of the immediate conversation, an important function of Rainbow Talk that I identified was that it provides a safe, non-confrontational language for speakers of various backgrounds to speak about the new South Africa. As was suggested in Chapter Two, imagining the nation requires people to have a language to speak about that nation. In the case of South Africa, where different groups have historically been indoctrinated with very divisive, exclusivist languages to think and talk about their own national communities, the need for an inclusive, consensual language is as evident as it is complex. With its blend of multicultural inclusion, future optimism and racially neutral civic elements, the Rainbow narrative provides for that language. It was striking that Rainbow talk was most prominent in the racially mixed focus groups. This finding in my view underscores the idea that Rainbow Talk serves a function in the immediate context of a conversation: it enables speakers of different racial background within the group to manage their relations with one another in a non-confrontational way. In racially mixed groups, the interest in such a unifying language is stronger than in groups with a racially homogenous composition. On the basis of this finding, I argued that the functions that a

certain repertoire fulfils depend not only on who is speaking but also, importantly, on who the audience is, and the relations between the speaker and audience that are being managed. The stakes in a particular identity repertoire thus not only differ from speaker to speaker but also from one context to the next.

*Rainbow Talk is normative*

Taking this idea a step further, I developed the insight that Rainbow Talk and specifically new patriotism is the *imperative, normative* discourse for talk about South African national identity. What brought this quality most poignantly to the fore were those instances where speakers deviated from the Rainbow narrative. Deviation from the narrative manifested itself in different ways. The 'weaker' version of deviation was seen in participants raising concerns that challenged the Rainbow image, the most important ones in this case being affirmative action and crime. Talk about these issues exemplified the normative character of Rainbow Talk. Speakers were seen to be carefully negotiating their critical remarks, making sure they stayed within the overall Rainbow framework. Several instances were found where a critique of the new South Africa was swiftly refuted by other group members responding with strongly new patriotic accounts. This was most strongly the case in the racially mixed groups. This observation lead me to conclude that Rainbow Talk serves a function not only on a macro-social/political level but also on the level of the immediate conversation: it is a language that allows for maintaining the social harmony in the group. Furthermore, this norm applied particularly to conversations in which speakers of various racial backgrounds took part. In racially homogeneous groups, this conversational function seemed to be less relevant. In some of these groups I found much stronger examples of deviation from the Rainbow Narrative, such as in the construction of divisive, racialized boundaries in Groups 2, 9 and 10. The ease and frequency by which racialized boundaries were drawn in non-mixed groups, specifically Groups 2 (black South Africans), 9 and 10 (white Afrikaner South Africans) was striking. The strongest form of deviation from the Rainbow narrative is the formulation of an alternative, competing version of the nation. In Group 2, we saw that Nombuso's version of the nation was informed by the Africanist ideology. This said, it is important to keep in mind that the audience people take into consideration is not only the immediate audience present, but also includes broader, virtual audiences. Although speakers in racially homogeneous groups were more direct in bringing up subjects that challenged the Rainbow narrative, they did show awareness of the normativity of Rainbow Talk and its subthemes in the South African public debate. For example, an indicator of this was the frequent use of non-racist disclaimers in the Afrikaner Group 10 (*'I'm not racist but...'*).



*Identity expressions are always idiosyncratic remakes*

The analysis demonstrated how the dominant collective repertoire about the nation was reproduced in idiosyncratic, locally specific ways. Different interpretations of the Rainbow repertoire were indeed forwarded to serve different identity projects. This was the case for example in Afrikaner Group 9, where speakers interpreted the 'unity in diversity' theme of the Rainbow narrative in a distinct way, promoting a version of clearly demarcated, separate cultures that should not be 'thrown together too quickly'. In this example we see two different assumptions from Chapter Two play themselves out in practice. Firstly, we see that the idiosyncratic reproduction of the collective repertoire is the result of two intersecting identity repertoires: that of the South African nation as a Rainbow Nation and that of the Afrikaner community as a community under threat. As a result, the version of the nation that is produced is a qualified version of the official, political repertoire. The second theoretical assumption that is manifest in this example is that ordinary persons reproduce the dilemmas inherent in political thought and ideology. In this case we see speakers actively pondering over and making sense of the dilemma between unity and diversity, and in this case arriving at their own 'solution'.

*Gap between the narrative and everyday experiences*

The impression derived from the interview material is that of a gap between the ambitions of the project of the Rainbow nation and accounts of experiences of in- and exclusion in everyday life. This was clear in those instances where speakers were cautiously forwarding their points of concern, the contradictions they perceived between the ambitions of the Rainbow project and reality, and internal contradictions within the Rainbow ideology. The cautious ways in which these alternative versions of the social world were being forwarded indicated the strong normative nature of the Rainbow repertoire. These examples also indicated the ideological dilemmas inherent in the Rainbow repertoire about the South African nation. As Billig et al. suggested in their 1988 work, ideological dilemmas provide the material for people to actively puzzle and argue over their social worlds (Billig et al. 1988:2). Indeed, participants in the focus groups were found to be struggling out loud with some of the internal dilemmas of the ideological make-up of the new South Africa, particularly those between non-racialism and equality, on the one hand, and racial redress and transformation, on the other. These dilemmas reflect what Brown has described as the ambiguity inherent in multiculturalism: '[an ambiguity...] which cannot easily distinguish between the (civic) call to celebrate ethnic diversity of the societies while being consciously color blind in allocating power and status, or the ethnocultural call to restructure the institutions of the state to conduct politics specifically on ethnic lines' (Brown 2000:48).

*Internationally oriented talk aims at positively positioning South Africa*

Most noteworthy of the internationally oriented talk examined in this chapter was the strong preoccupation with the image that South Africa is perceived to have in the world and specifically with the alleged image South Africa has in the eyes of what are represented as the most respectable and advanced of nations: the nation-states of the 'West'. Here, there was a very direct and immediate action orientation to most of the talk: to rebut the negative stereotype and forward a more positive image of the nation. A key interest of the externally oriented talk was to position South Africa as a respectable member of the world of nation-states. Alternatively phrased, there talk in this study reflected a widespread concern of South Africa being 'excluded', of not being treated as equal by the nation-states of the 'West'. The 'West' clearly dominated as significant Other, and the comparison between the 'West' and South Africa was guiding the positioning of South Africa internationally. Here, too, the Rainbow repertoire provides a useful resource: it provides a way to positively position South Africa within the world of nation-states. The international impact of South Africa's peaceful transition to democracy, the extraordinary internationally respected status of Nelson Mandela as the personification of that transition – these are tropes that can successfully be employed to favourably position South Africa at the international level. The frequently found 'ambassador talk', strongly building on the repertoire of new patriotism, indicates the normative character of this positive identity project. At the same time, the talk echoed the ambivalence in simultaneously wanting to belong to and differentiate from the African continent, and the ideological dilemma between (pan) Africanism or Afro-optimism and exceptionalism. Here we have different comparative contexts – or in the words of Barth different settings of social interaction – leading to the selection of different boundary markers. The analysis of those externally oriented accounts clearly showed how the identity project pursued in the conversation was constantly evolving and changing, and different versions of the South African nation were being forwarded, depending on the stakes within a specific conversational context.

*Specific issue for black speakers: authentic blackness*

Focusing specifically on the identity talk of speakers of a racial majority background – the black African speakers in my focus groups – revealed more about the interests that are driving speakers' constructions of the nation and the ways in which different ideological repertoires can be employed to accomplish those constructions. An important finding was the fact that speakers of a black African background were frequently seen to be addressing their own community in their talk. Being part of the numerical majority, the key identity issue at stake for these speakers was not how do I ensure my own place as an

‘authentic South African’? Rather, it was how do I ensure being perceived as an ‘authentic black’? Constructing the South African nation along Africanist lines, emphasizing racialized boundaries and sharply distinguishing between black and non-black South Africans could be interpreted as a strategy of these speakers to ensure their own inclusion within the black community. For those black Africans who are attending middle class, ‘Model-C’ schools, the main identity threat is not exclusion from the South African nation, but exclusion from their own ethnocultural communities. An exclusive, Africanist version of the nation – emphasizing the boundaries between the different racial communities within South Africa, ‘Othering’ the non-black communities and so on – can be seen as a strategy towards this end. These findings do not contradict my general point about identity constructions being driven first and foremost by a need for inclusion. What varies from one speaker to the next is the question of which community a person fears to be excluded from.

*Specific issue for Afrikaner speakers: rehabilitation and preservation of the own culture*

In the case of the Afrikaner groups, it was not just an interest in being included in the South African national community that was driving the identity accounts of these speakers. In addition, a very clear interest was the rehabilitation and preservation of the Afrikaner culture that was presented as being under threat, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal. In this, my respondents echoed similar discourses as those found in other studies on Afrikaner talk (for instance Steyn 2001). It is quite possible that the homogenous composition of the groups allowed for the second interest to override the first. In any case, what I found was that the intersection between these two interests resulted in a qualified construction of the dominant Rainbow repertoire. The interest in the preservation of one’s own culture was served by constructing a Rainbow Nation of ‘polite proximities’ (Nuttall 2000:6) rather than real integration. For some, the interest was best served by denouncing the feasibility of a collective South African national identity all together, and instead constructing a racially exclusive Afrikaner national identity. It was also in this group that we clearly saw the dilemmatic position of the ‘born free’ generation. Members of the Afrikaner groups were seen to be actively struggling between a commitment to the new South Africa and a commitment to the preservation and rehabilitation of their own specific subgroup: two contradictory interests that require fundamentally different types of repertoires.

The overall purpose of the analysis presented in this chapter was to empirically demonstrate how the expressions of national identity of ordinary speakers are made up of both collectively available resources or repertoires and idiosyncratic elements, a key

assumption in my theoretical framework as presented in Chapter Two. In this chapter it became clear that the political and ideological repertoires about the South African nation formulated in Chapter Three indeed directly and widely feed into the national identity talk in my focus groups. This was achieved through the methodological approach that examined both shared, thematic interpretative repertoires across a set of interviews and the locally specific instantiation of those repertoires and their specific action orientation. Through this analysis, light was shed on the double dimension of identity talk as being collective and individual or personal at the same time. We also clearly saw how national identity talk is highly variable, not only across different individuals but also across specific contexts and conversational settings.

In the next chapter, the phenomenon of variability of identity expressions across time will be added to this picture. The focus of that chapter is how speakers incorporate the two different critical events within their national identity talk.



## Chapter 6: Two critical events

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### Introduction

In this chapter, I will take the notion of contextual specificity of identity talk one step further, by including the idea that identity talk also varies *across time*. In my study, examining variations across time is possible because I held focus groups with the exact same groups of speakers at two different moments, in 2007 and 2008. While the previous chapter focused almost entirely on extracts from the 2007 transcripts, the current chapter will centre on a comparison between the 2007 and 2008 data.

My main interest in the current chapter is in how the discursive meanings given to national identity –both the shared and collective dimension and the subjective, in situ dimension – shift in response to short-term changes in the macro-social context. If in their national identity talk people draw from collectively available repertoires about their nation, how do they respond to events that call into question or contradict elements of these repertoires? How do they accommodate these new features of the context in their subjective, in situ identity constructions?

### The two events in this study

In the theoretical chapter, the importance of deliberately staged events and ritual performances for national identity was emphasized. I reiterated the well-documented point that international sports events are particularly suited for the ritualistic exposure to and reinforcement of national identity. An international sports event is an example of a manipulated event and, in the case of a triumph, it is a manipulated event that can affirm national identity. Such an 'identity-affirming event' formed the backdrop of the 2007 focus groups.

The opposite type of event is an event that discredits or weakens national identity, the type of event that could lead to a split in the national community (Reicher and Hopkins 2001). Most likely, this will not be a manipulated but rather an uncontrolled, unanticipated event. In 2008, the second series of focus groups took place just after such an uncontrolled, discrediting event had taken place: a wave of xenophobic violence across different South African townships. In its own, painful way, this was a national identity-

invoking event: the event was all about the drawing of sharp boundaries between nationals and non-nationals. Moreover, the event gave rise to complex questions of collective shame and guilt that fought their way into the discursive construction of national identity in the 2008 focus groups. Rather than the impact of these particular events on national identity as such, what interests me here are the ways in which participants in the focus groups incorporated the two events in their national identity talk. How do speakers 'deal' with the events in relation to the dominant ideological repertoires that underpin their talk? Do the events bring contradictions or dilemmas within these repertoires to the surface?

In Chapter Five, I discussed dominant and alternative ideological repertoires that participants were drawing on in their talk. While these repertoires have become routine, repetitive and – in the words of Wetherell (2003) – 'have a history', an event like an instant international sports triumph makes for a much more momentary resource. Momentary, but not less significant for that. After all, identity expressions are always temporarily situated and an event that dominates at a given moment will inevitably feed into identity talk recorded at that particular moment. Momentary events are as much part of the context in which a person makes sense of his national identity as are routine ideological repertoires. They throw a specific light on the available identity repertoires, and the speaker has to accommodate them in his or her account. As discussed in Chapter Two, national identity is *refracted* through these momentary events. In fact, ways of talking about these events might be developed that in and of themselves become part of routine repertoires about the nation. This chapter will focus on precisely these processes.

## **2007: The Rugby World Cup triumph**

The first series of focus groups was organised only days after South Africa had won the Rugby World Cup title in France, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2007. In the theoretical chapter, I discussed the importance of the arena of international sports for celebrations of national identity. I suggested that the abstract, imagined national community becomes personified by the national sports team. If that national team successfully competes with the teams of significant Other nations, this is bound to be an important symbolic resource for national pride. International sports events carry an additional significance in the South African context because of the country's long history of isolation from the world of international sports. That post-apartheid politicians considered international sports a primary resource for promoting national reconciliation became abundantly clear during the 1995 Rugby World Cup. It is also manifest in the ways in which post-apartheid

governments have been eager to host international mega sports events, such as the 2010 Soccer World Cup and a number of other important tournaments.

Indeed, the 2007 Rugby World Cup triumph triggered jubilations across the country, and colourful images of a spirit of national unity – both in the stadium and on the streets – were widely broadcast. This was against the expectations. In many respects, the 2007 event was lacking the momentous circumstances of South Africa's previous Rugby World Cup triumph of 1995. The latter occurred shortly after the historical first democratic elections, in a tournament played on South African soil, blessed with the charismatic presence of then President Mandela. The 2007 tournament took place against the backdrop of a different political climate – one of increasing polarization and growing dissatisfaction about service delivery. The time frame in which the 2007 triumph took place was one in which the national mood had shifted to anxiety and uncertainty. Indeed, as Botma (2010) writes, before the 2007 Rugby Final, few observers expected the Springboks to win the 2007 Cup. Even fewer expected an unlikely triumph to trigger such unifying celebrations.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the shift in emphasis from the theme of reconciliation to that of transformation under the Mbeki presidency. Whether applied to the labor market or to the arena of sports, transformation has proven to be a prime issue of polarization and contestation in South Africa. Although transformation in sports is also about fundamental change at the grass roots level of local clubs, most visible and politicized are the debates around racial representation in the national team. The issue of the 'quota-system' – a concrete policy instrument to effect transformation in sport – has become a topic of heated debate. Rugby, a sport that more than any other has been marked by the legacy of apartheid segregation, is perceived to be one of the sports in which transformation is slow. In the years before the 2007 triumph, the arena of rugby had become a battle ground of sharp debates about transformation (Desai and Nabbi 2007:419).

The first focus group in 2007 was held only two days after the rugby triumph. At that moment still, pictures of the victorious team dominated the newspapers, cars were attired with South African flags and Springbok shirts could be spotted everywhere. It was unmistakably the topic of the day, which made it a very natural and lively topic to start off the 2007 conversations. In all the focus groups, I began by passing around the same poster, a poster showing the celebrating team and President Mbeki holding up the trophy. The question was very open: 'Could you tell me what your feelings were about this?' I deliberately avoided linking the topic to national identity. The discussions that



ensued were analyzed in the same manner as the overall data (as described in Chapter Five). The first point to note is that, as expected, the discussions about the Rugby World Cup are unquestionably discussions about South African national identity. My second observation is that the rugby talk looked somewhat like a micro-cosmos of the broader public debate on national identity – echoing identical questions of inclusion, exclusion and transformation. Importantly, however, all these questions lost their sharp edges in the euphoric moment of the triumph. Thirdly, the rugby triumph served to illustrate how the identity project of the Rainbow nation is a prospective, unaccomplished project – an aspect that would become even more pronounced in the 2008 discussions.

### **A confirmation of the desired Rainbow image**

For a start, the rugby triumph triggered enthusiastic expressions of national pride in all focus groups, although reactions were a bit more subdued in the township groups. Interestingly for the current analysis was the fact that speakers spontaneously linked the event to the familiar repertoires about South African national identity. If anything, speakers eagerly seized the rugby triumph as an opportunity to validate South Africa's self-chosen identity as a Rainbow nation. In the previous chapter, I described how the dominant repertoires feeding into participants constructions of their nation and of South Africans were the repertoires of the unity in diversity, reconciliation, non-racialism and new patriotism: in short, 'Rainbow talk'. The most prominent 'effect' of the rugby triumph was that it facilitated, confirmed and reinforced Rainbow talk. The event provided concrete content for speaker's constructions of South Africa and South Africans in the terms of the Rainbow narrative and its subthemes. The most obvious subthemes the rugby triumph helped to articulate were those of unity in diversity and non-racialism. The event facilitated constructions of South Africans as people united in support of the team, regardless of the racial or cultural background of either spectator or rugby player. Across all focus groups, many speakers lauded this inclusive, multiracial, unifying effect of the event.

Bongani: You know what is nice about this? On the day of the match, at Wembley Stadium...

Dumisani: Woodburn.

Bongani: ...Woodburn stadium, you saw everybody, black, white, Indian, coloured, old people, young people, you know, being together, sharing like one of the greatest... like, moments in South African history. Which is the championship right there. Um... it was great because when we, you know, when... and the flags of the country go up... and that was like, everyone screamed and sang the national anthem. You know, everyone did that. As South Africans. There was no black and white, there was no nothing, we're all just pure South Africans.

Dumisani: I was there.

Int: Oh, you were? In Woodburn Stadium?

Dumisani: Yes.

Int: Yeah, was that... did he [Bongani] describe it well? Was that the vibe there?

Dumisani: Yeah, precisely.

Black males, Group 2, 2008

Another indicator of a strong sense of non-racial inclusion was expressions of identification with the team. The team was presented by several speakers as 'our team', 'our boys', or plainly 'us' – indicators that the team was indeed presented as the personification of the national community.

Int: So Mandla, what did you think?

Mandla: Um, while I was watching the game, when I saw... at the, at the... before the beginning of the game I knew that we were going to win the World Cup because we've beaten England before. So, like, during the first... during the first half, I was disappointed because there were no, there were no tries. And we've got people like Brian Habana who took the player of the year, player of the tournament and... all of them, who's this... John Smith is a good captain and stuff, Percy Montgomery, but we have like the good kick of Percy Montgomery, and he kicked us to... to having the World Cup. But I was a bit disappointed with the tries but I knew, we were gonna win and stuff. But I was also, like, ecstatic after the whistle was blown, after Francois Steyn kicked the ball out and like... 'Yes, that's us!' 'Our blood is green!'

Black male, Group 1, 2007

Nesira: I was very proud of them, because my favorite player was the captain, and, um, when he picked up the Cup it was like... to know that those players on the field represented our whole nation, and for that Saturday, the whole country was united just by one game. And when he brought the trophy home yesterday, everybody was so excited and ecstatic, and I truly agree that we did deserve it and that's one of the reasons why sport is played, is because to unite countries and unite people, and you saw how everybody came together, and everybody was wearing green and gold, and whenever you asked, people were happy and sharing with this. I was very proud of my country.

Indian female, Group 4, 2007

The rugby triumph also served the promotion of new patriotism, as the event could be interpreted as an example of what can be achieved if South Africans work together to

build up something. It was drawn upon as a symbol for the progress South Africa is making towards the future.

Mpumelelo: I think it was, um, it was something that motivated the whole country and for each individual to strive for something better. By winning the World Cup they showed everybody that you can achieve anything. And that, um, you don't have to be either... maybe a coloured, a black or an Indian, but as long as you set yourself to prove a goal or actually achieve something in life you will be able to actually achieve it.

Black female, Group 7, 2007

In the extract below, Mike draws on the event to assert South Africa clearly against the apartheid past – something that speakers across the board were seen to be doing.

Mike: I think... I think South Africa is growing stronger every day. Like now... we have so many connections all over the world, globally I mean, like... like the 2010... 2010 World Cup, Soccer World Cup, is going to be held here, in South Africa. I think that's another... that's another breakthrough that we have made from... when we were looking back at the dark ages that we had, like, when there was racism, you know that black people weren't given the respect that they deserved.

Int: So this for you also symbolizes that?

Mike: Yeah, we're going somewhere.

Black male, Group 6, 2007

The event also facilitated the construction of a positive South African identity on an international level. International sports tournaments function as a site for the (peaceful) assertion of one nation against another, for ranking, showcasing and stereotyping nations. This way, they are the ultimate manifestation of the external dimension of national identity construction. In this context it is especially relevant that rugby is predominantly played by Commonwealth and European nations, so that South Africa is competing with teams of those nations we saw are considered 'significant Others'. It is not unimportant that South Africa won the 2007 title in a match against England, a nation that is so frequently chosen as a focus for comparison, and a nation with a complex historical relationship with South Africa. Beating a 'powerful' nation only boasts national confidence even more. In Chapter Five, I discussed the strong preoccupation speakers seemed to have with the perceived negative image of South Africa in the world. In several groups, speakers first and foremost made use of the rugby triumph to firmly rebut that image.

Int: I'd like to know what your thoughts were, what your feelings were, Saturday when this happened?

Elsie: I felt incredibly, incredibly proud. Yeah, I was crying, actually, I was really crying. I was so proud, I couldn't, I couldn't put it into words. I was so happy...

Mandy: That was like the worst 80 minutes and then the best time afterwards.

Int: Was it?

Mandy: Yeah.

Marius: I just, I just felt it was, uh... good for the country, that's the first thing I thought about like, what's the rest of the world thinking now? Like everybody's got something to say about South Africa somewhere, and now we win the World Cup, now what are they saying now?

Lisa: Yeah, we just proved everyone wrong.

Int: What is it that you think that everyone's thinking about South Africa?

Marius: I don't know, they are just so sceptical, um, because of the, um, the way we are, um, living, um, living it out to the rest of the world, like, the days with apartheid and now the government and all that. Now, they were sceptical, and once they've this I think they've got a different mind on.

Afrikaner females, males, Group 9, 2007

In the extract below, Busi recounts feeling proud of her country 'for once', suggesting that there is not only a negative international image to be battled, but also a negative self-image:

Busi: Yes, I agree. But like I was just saying, like, I'm not a really big rugby fan but like, um, it was, like... there's a certain vibe like you know everyone had to watch the rugby but then I also, like, watched it, and I was really proud of South Africa, like, for once because I mean, like, about, like, everything that we hear about South Africa is always, like, mostly, like, on the negative, like, on the crime and we won't be able to host the 2010 because of the crime and everything. But then I mean when this came, like, it gave hope for some people, you know. I think I was really proud. I mean, like, seeing Mbeki there, he was so proud and I was, like, you know, like, 'Oh my word', you know I felt proud for, like, once, you know, of South Africa.

Black female, Group 7, 2007

In just one group, the event was placed in the context of South Africa's place in Africa. Thulani used the triumph to promote the idea of elevation of the whole continent, reminiscent of the ideology on the African Renaissance:

Thulani: Well, I think it is great achievement for the country, and not only for South Africa, as well for Africa, you know and so we... just... we stand out, as South Africans, we can achieve such a great victory. And also it's a great achievement for every player. You know, to be in this kind of situation and, um, bring the World Cup – it's a World Cup – to South Africa. You know, most people would not think that a country in Africa could do such a remarkable thing. And yeah, it's a great achievement and... from the past... um... sport.

Int: When you say it's a great achievement for Africa, could you explain a bit more?

How you think that will impact on African... on other African countries?

Thulani: Well I feel, I think that it will stimulate most of the countries in Africa and, um... probably give more insights to the people of different countries, you know, to try and discover their talent, and maybe learning how to play a sport, and be competitive against South Africa. You know, and hopefully one day they will bring back the Cup to their country, and bring honor to their people. And, yeah...

Int: So you think most other African countries were strongly supporting South Africa as well?

Thulani: Well, I think so, yes, I think so.

Zanele: Because I mean they set the example to all other countries. Because of what they did. If they stick... if they could do it, I'm sure any other country can do it as well. If they just put that much more in... yeah.

Black male, black female, Group 4, 2007

The accounts of Thulani and Zanele reflect the familiar blend of the African Renaissance ideology with exceptionalism: South Africa is the nation that stands out, that sets the example for the rest of the continent, and perhaps one day in the distant future, the other African countries might follow.

These examples illustrate that the rugby triumph served to facilitate the construction of a South African national identity based on Rainbow themes, and to position South Africa favorably both within the African continent and globally. All in all, the event proved to be an ideal resource for the confirmation of the dominant post-apartheid national identity project.

## Variations in context and across different groups

When I analyzed variations in the rugby talk across the different conversational settings, the first thing noted was the large degree of consensus on the Rainbow interpretation of the event as sketched above. The event seems to fit in perfectly with the identity project

that South Africa has set up for itself, and most speakers were seen to be willingly embracing it in this way. In the moment of the event, all are winners: the event helps to construct an image of South Africa in which everybody is included, with inclusive, non-racial boundaries. Indeed, a euphoric, unifying interpretation of the event reminiscent of the 1995 Rugby World Cup dominates the talk, despite the difference in socio-political circumstances between 1995 and 2007. This is not to say that the event is a completely uncontested topic across all focus groups. In many groups, speakers echoed the public debate about transformation, either spontaneously or after having queried by the interviewer. Speakers did address the fact that rugby was historically perceived to be a 'white sport', as well as questions of representation in relation to the rugby team and the rugby audience. Importantly, however, these issues were not reproduced in the squarely polarizing way that we might have expected. The repertoire of the unifying, non-racial euphoria of the Rugby World Cup was certainly the norm. When speakers did bring in issues of race, they would make sure these accounts fitted into the overall, optimistic, inclusive repertoire.

### **The dominant pattern: maintaining the racially inclusive boundary**

Although speakers across all groups touched upon the issue that rugby was still disproportionately played and watched by white South Africans, the general mood of euphoria and inclusive unity prevented this subject from overshadowing the rugby triumph talk. In many instances, I found speakers having a non-confrontational, reconciliatory approach towards the question of rugby still bearing the marks of historical inequities. When addressing the question of representation – both at the level of the team and of the supporters – they mostly did so in a manner avoiding suggestions of polarization or exclusion.

Mike: Um... well my suggest... for my suggestion, I would say I'm proud of my country because it's been like long... since South Africa won a Rugby World Cup, in 1995. I think it has made us proud. And most of all, South Africa is a very united country as... during the apartheid era times, blacks were not allowed to play rugby. Yes, that's what I can say.

Int: And nowadays, um... 'cause this team, there's still not so many black people in the team, hey?

Group: Yes.

Int: There were some discussions about that, hey? Does that matter for you?

Precious: Yes, black must put more effort when it comes to sports like rugby.

Mike: No it doesn't matter.

Int: You, Precious, think they must put more effort...?

Precious: Yes.

Int: OK. You disagree, Mike?

Mike: Yeah. I think it doesn't matter. We are all South Africans. White or black, it's all the same thing.

Black male, black female, Group 6, 2007

The dominant response to the question of the racial composition of the team was to draw on the repertoire about 'merit over representation': the best players should be represented on the team, regardless of their skin colour. When it comes to the labour market, this argument just represents one side in an unsettled debate. In the context of this sports triumph, however, it was remarkably consensual. Furthermore, in their explanations for the uneven racial representation in and access to rugby, very few speakers referred to patterns of historical inequity and segregation. Instead, most speakers attributed this uneven representation to questions of individual choice, of black people simply not showing much interest in getting involved in the game.

Thulani: And I would think also the rugby, you know most people would think it's a racial game. From previous past it'd be only whites play the game. But, um, that has changed. You know when I was at Woodburn Stadium on Saturday...

Int: Oh, you were there?

Thulani: Yes, there were whites there, but there were more blacks than whites. You know some of them got to understand the game. They love the game. It's just there, it's got the spirit. And um, also there's a few more players, a couple of players in the country as well, playing for the country, and, um, yeah, it's just changed. It has changed. But also, you have to account that only the best has to be taken. You know we can all go and participate, you know try our best for trials, but the best, will win the Cup.

Int: Yes, that was a debate, in the lead-on to the tournament, about whether you pick the best or whether you select a team that is more representative of the country. Because now it's still, the majority are white players, which is not the situation in the country, so that was a big discussion of course. But you... anyone feels that the government has a point? That it should be more representative?

Thulani: Well, I think that, um, in past, you know rugby was played by the whites; it was something that was not introduced so much into the black society. You know, unlike the soccer. If you take a look at soccer, there's more blacks than whites.

And if you take a look at rugby there's more whites than blacks. So I would think that it is something that was not clearly introduced to them, and they focused on certain sports to them, and as for the whites, they more concentrated on what they have learned from their forefathers as well, the game that they learned, how to play it, and just put aside the others in the game...

Int: Anyone has any different thoughts on that, or...?

Mahindra: I just think the whites have very easy access, in comparison with like blacks in settlements or in our area as, um, as such. Because the whites, their schools, their areas have training facilities. And rugby is a difficult sport to get proper training facilities for. And coaches. And I think we're disadvantaged in that. If we wanted to play rugby, we'll have to go to a white area, and it will be costly.

Black male, Indian male, Group 4, 2007

In this extract we see the speakers balancing different approaches to the question of uneven representation. Thulani is emphasizing the growing inclusion of black people in the game, in combination with the 'merit over representation' repertoire. Mahindra is slightly more critical and brings up the question of historically based uneven access. This part of the discussion was followed by a discussion about the fact that in their own school, these kids do not have rugby facilities. In the account below, we see Lindiwe trivializing structural, historical explanations of uneven access to rugby. Instead, she suggests that the lack of black participation in the game has to do with a lack of interest on the part of black people, but that this is now changing.

Lindiwe: Well, me, I'm not actually... I wasn't a rugby fan, I was a soccer fan. I love soccer, I watch soccer every weekend, but then when I heard that we were in the World Cup final, it was only against England, I was, like: 'OK, wow!' South Africa in the finals, I mean that never happens in... South Africa... in South African soccer. So I watched the game, on that day when we were playing England in the finals. And I don't know anything about counting the scores, what the trials were, you know. And then I had this other... my father's friend who understood the game well, and he kept on explaining what's happening, OK, when they kick the ball and when it goes into that kind of 'H-sign', what happened, you know. And I was, like, OK this game is interesting. It's not only for whites, but it's also a universal sports. You can actually relate to it. Because I'm... I'm a sport person; I love to play sport, um... I play a lot of sport, when I was introduced to rugby, I choose for... the minute we actually won the Cup, I was, like, OK, wow, South Africa is going places, and we're gonna be well known about... about what kind of people we are and we are capable of doing things like this, like winning the World Cup. Yes.

Int: You're saying it used to be more... or you're saying it is not only for whites, made you realize it's not only for whites. Is that only since this particular victory that that sort of...



Lindiwe: No, no, because... no, the team itself, the South African rugby team, mostly you'll find only white Afrikaners, you know it's kind of, like, they isolated themselves from... from the black people. But it's not like that. The black people don't want... how can I put this... OK, the black people are the ones who don't understand the game. And they claim that... right now, here at school, as you can see, most people are our colour skin, you know. And our rugby first team, most people who are playing rugby are like him [points to Mandla], are black. And so the black people are also trying to understand what's happening in the rugby. They're getting... it's kind of like a new thing to them, they're getting introduced to the game, because they don't know anything about the game of rugby and so... so *ja*... it's like... even in the soccer games, most... most of all you'll see in the stadium, you'll see blacks. But right now, even whites are getting into the game.

Black female, Group 1, 2007

That support for rugby is in fact still not at all evenly spread across racial and class divisions manifested itself in the responses of the kids in the township school. From their accounts it was clear that the rugby triumph represented something remote from their everyday lives. Nevertheless, they too held up the overall optimistic, inclusive interpretation of the event:

Int: I think we can all say... you know maybe some of you haven't seen it or you have no thoughts about it, but can we all just share with the group what our thoughts were? Who wants to start? Buhle?

Buhle: OK, my thoughts... I think rugby makes us proud.

Int: The game... this specific game as well made you proud?

Buhle: This game... I didn't watch it, but I heard that our country won the World Cup, I also got happy, because our country is in the top five in rugby, and that makes me proud.

Black male, Group 5, 2007

Most importantly, the question of historically unequal, racialized access to rugby was transformed into a question of black people gradually but surely achieving a sense of ownership over the game. Through that interpretation of the issue, it could be made to fit into the narrative of South Africa's break with the apartheid era and the empowerment of previously disadvantaged people since the transition to democracy. From a potential challenge to the Rainbow repertoire, the issue was transformed into an affirmation. Across the dataset, I repetitively found this story being told among African and Indian speakers, of how they themselves and other members of their families and communities got involved in rugby for the very first time through this particular event. These stories of acquiring ownership – becoming included in something that has historically been a site of

exclusion – only amplified the identity-affirming effect of the rugby triumph. In the extract below, note the contrasts between ‘having no clue what’s going on’ and talking about ‘our boys’ within the same utterance:

Int: OK, so South Africa might, I mean, this has a different sort of weight in a country like South Africa?

Gugu: Yeah, if we find people like my sister, who didn’t know a thing about rugby, actually watching it, and saying, ‘What is he doing?’

Nombuso: Like my mother said, um, when they’re coming back from Durban, she said, ‘Hurry! When does it start, when does it start?’ ‘No, nine o’clock’. And she sat, like, in the taxi when they’re coming back in Maritzburg, um, this one guy was, like, ‘You know, I want to go home and watch the rugby, but I don’t have no clue what’s going on’. ‘I have no clue what’s going on’. But they’re watching because they know, our boys are playing and we’re gonna win, we’re gonna win!

Gugu: Kind of people like my father rushing home, like, ‘You? Rushing for rugby?’ With the soccer, it’s ok, but...

Black females, Group 2, 2007

### **The exception: using the event to draw racialized boundaries**

In the entire set of transcripts of 2007, there were three instances where the event was used to draw exclusive, racial boundaries instead of the dominant inclusive, non-racial boundaries. Unsurprisingly, this was in those same groups that generally showed a greater degree of racialized talk: Groups 2, 9 and 10. In two instances, racialized boundaries were drawn in relation to the appearance of President Mbeki at the match in Paris.<sup>53</sup>

Int: Now, to get us talking a little bit, I brought something that I’d like you to tell me... tell me what your feelings are or were about this [shows poster of the rugby victory]?

Gugu: Oh no...

Bheka: Wonderful.

Gugu: Hope it’s not going to be about this the whole day...

Int: No, it’s not. Why do you say that? You’re fed up with it?

<sup>53</sup> Mbeki’s performance in Paris and general involvement in the event – or lack thereof – had generated public debate. Mbeki’s performance was said to be cold and distant, and nothing like his predecessor’s involvement in the 1995 World Cup Final. This is mirroring more general criticism of Mbeki’s style of governance, which was believed by many to be lacking the charismatic qualities of that of his predecessor.

Gugu: No, rugby, I was so proud, I was so proud, but I had a problem with the shaking of the president's hands. You know some just passed Thabo Mbeki and didn't shake his hand. Which I thought was a bit racist, really. And disrespectful. Because some he had to grab them and pull them back to shake their hand. Yeah so, that... yeah.

Int: And you think it might be a racist... motivated by racist...

Gugu: Yeah, I think so, because when I was listening to the news I hear...was it the French speaking or something... they didn't want to speak English... they kept on speaking their own language...

Int: Must be the French.

Gugu: [badly audible] They kept on speaking their language, they didn't switch to English so that everybody could hear what they were saying. So there was the race thing going on.

Int: Oh, OK. So who was not shaking the hands of the president? It was not the rugby players, was it?

Gugu: It was the rugby players.

Int: The South African players?

Gugu: Yes, some of the South African players but mostly the other players that were from the other team. Yeah. They were not shaking his hand.

Black female, Group 2, 2007

Unlike most speakers, for Gugu the euphoria of the rugby triumph is overshadowed by racialized divisions. Her choice of words 'the race thing going on' indicates a commonsensical phenomenon, as if her audience is quite familiar with what 'the race thing' entails. However, in the ensuing conversation there is some confusion about the main culprits of 'the race thing' – nationals or non-nationals. In the extract below, note how Marius talks about rugby players and supporters not being President Mbeki's 'people'.

Mandy: I think that picture speaks a million words on its own [Mbeki hugging captain John Smit].

Int: That one on the top?

Mandy: The fact that it is the president, and, um, yeah. It's, like, yeah, I think the game united the whole of SA. Because even when they arrived at the airport, the people, like, they slept there from 3 o'clock, and it's not just, ok, white people that was there, it was all kinds of people. That stood together.

Marius: And the other thing is the president actually tried to do something in France or once they won the World Cup. He looked a bit uncomfortable with the situation because it's not his people but I think he tried and then...

Int: Do you think that's how he feels, that it's not his people?

Marius: I think he felt uncomfortable with the situation because he's never been in a situation like this. I think, um, he did a great job regarding, like, his effort and, and all that. And I think, um, he might have felt it was his people, but, um, I don't think he, yeah, he's never been in a situation where the people are, um, celebrating or something like that.

Int: Is it because it's the rugby team? Would it be different if it were the soccer team? For him?

Marius: Yeah. I think it will be different then.

Conrad: Yeah, very differently.

Int: He feels more at ease there?

Marius, Conrad: Yeah.

Elsie: I mean, we, you can't look past the fact that we have different cultures, you can't look past that. And soccer... would more like be on his side and rugby on ours. So it's... we respect that, it's not like it is wrong but it's just logical that he would be more comfortable with the soccer team than with us.

Afrikaner males, females, Group 9, 2007

In this extract we see the group struggling somewhat between claiming rugby for the Afrikaner community (*'soccer would be more on his side and rugby on ours', 'it's not his people'*) and at the same time acknowledging the inclusive nature of the event and praising the president's performance (*'it was all kinds of people that stood together', 'the president actually tried to do something in France'*).

When queried further, Marius nuances his first remark, apparently mindful of its controversial potential in front of a virtual audience. Elsie's final explanatory statement fits perfectly into this group's general interpretation of the Rainbow Nation as a nation of distinct, separate cultural entities with little real integration: a Rainbowism of 'polite proximities' (see Chapter Five). In the other Afrikaner group, the euphoria of the moment was instantly tempered for Peter like a hangover after a good party:

Peter: Well, personally when... just after we won, I also felt great and... but the next day when I read the paper, I read about the fact that the... you know, about the quota-stelsel we have here in South Africa, um... that they're going to push it up to ten players, and after that, after I read that, I thought: Where's rugby going now?

Int: Ten players...

Peter: Ten quotas, 'cause they say...

Int: Of a different color.

Peter: Of a different color, *ja*. Now, um, I'm not racist, but if they... if you rather put someone who's disadvantaged into a player's position who really can play... I know it's a bit... you know, you're trying to make up for apartheid. But you're still... you're taking that player who can play his chance away. And you're taking the next chance for a World Cup away. And also, I read about all the players we're losing, that's ending their rugby careers, or going overseas to play for other countries because of all the political problems with South African rugby.

Afrikaner male, Group 10, 2007

Peter, who elsewhere claimed that his collective South African identity is unimportant to him, feels little need to utilize the event to reinforce the Rainbow image. By contrast, for Lourie – who, as we have seen in Chapter Five, positions himself as a 'new-age Afrikaner' – the Rainbow image has more value, and he nuances Peter's words:

Lourie: But we have seen a lot of transformation in... not only in our Springbok team but in the local teams as well. You know, we've got the Blue Bulls and all those type of sub-teams that play a... provincial teams that play. I don't... I won't say that... yes, they are in the minority there, but they're definitely holding a much stronger share than previous years. And... and I've got no problem with a coloured player, as long as they play good. You know we've got... I mean this is my hero here, Habana, I mean, he's so... he's a top... top try-scorer in South Africa... I mean, but I see him in the same light as Percy Montgomery who is the most... who had the most... who's the biggest point-scorer in the World Cup. So I don't have a problem with it. I'm just saying: choose them on merits. Don't choose them on anything else.

Afrikaner male, Group 10, 2007

Hence, even in those groups where the Rugby World Cup triggered the drawing of racialized boundaries, this was not unanimous and uncontested. In each of those conversations, critical interpretations of the event were moderated either by the

speakers themselves or by other speakers in the group. At the end of the day, the rugby triumph created an optimistic mood that most speakers wanted to be part of.<sup>54</sup>

### **A glimpse of the identity aspired to**

If we assess the talk on the Rugby World Cup within the broader context of national identity construction going on in this dataset, it becomes clear that it serves an important function. As said above, the narrative of the Rainbow nation represents a *prospective* project: it is about the identity that the speakers would like South Africa to have. The interviews reflect an imagining of the South African national community moving on a timeline from the past, through the present and into the future of that identity. The Rugby World Cup facilitates this imagining of the nation moving closer towards this future identity. The festivities around the triumph, with South Africans of all races and socio-economic backgrounds uniting in jubilation for the team, demonstrated the possibility of a country united in diversity. Second, the triumph confirmed the image of a nation that is successful in the international arena and can beat a powerful nation like England. At the same time, the triumph is a very momentary event, and the step forwards into the future it represents is fleeting. Consequently, the euphoric moment represents a cherished 'glimpse' at a utopian future. The quotes below illustrate this perfectly:

Elsie: I would like, like, when the Springboks won, that feeling that you got, I would like that, because it felt like everybody was happy with you. The whole South Africa, no matter where they are, were happy with you. I would like that we could have that feeling every day, in everyone. Then it would be perfect.

Mandy: I think... sorry.

Int: No, please...

Mandy: I think before the World Cup and the views then and now, it's totally different, because I think even in Pietermaritzburg everything has just... how the vibe is better.

Int: In these few days, you noticed a difference?

Mandy: Yeah.

Afrikaner females, Group 9, 2007

<sup>54</sup> As Botma points out, there was an important gap between popular perceptions of the 2007 triumph and a generally negative media discourse, in which the unifying effect was downplayed and racial antagonisms were emphasized (Botma 2010:13).

This stretch of talk is taken from the end of the conversation in Group 9. Like all groups, this group had addressed the rugby triumph at the start. After that, the conversation had soon lost the euphoric connotations of the first part, and the debate had been dominated by questions of exclusion, threats to the Afrikaner culture, racial segregation and crime. It is in this context that Elsie spontaneously brought up her longing for the rugby euphoria to last, the moment of unity, inclusion and reconciliation to become permanent. That she sees this as a utopian future perspective is utterly clear in her account. Mandy for her part is a bit more optimistic, seeing the changed mood as a turning point towards a 'totally different vibe', indicating that for her, the event has pushed South Africa in the desired direction. In the quotes below, Zanele and Shanice also construct the event as nothing less than a turning point towards a positive future:

Zanele: Just as Talika said, I'm also not a fan of rugby, but on Saturday it was, like, it's, like, I've been watching like sports, like, I don't know for how long. Because everybody everywhere, every station, everybody was, like, proud and talking about the World Cup, everybody's wearing green and gold, and it made me see something about our country that, despite all the disadvantages and everything that's been happening, there is something good that comes out of it. And it makes everybody proud, 'cause I mean, it's like our country and they represent us. Like, everybody was into this game. Just one game. It changed all our lives, all our minds, all our thinking. So I believe that it really made us proud, really.

African female, Group 4, 2007

Shanice: Yes, I play rugby and when I, when I watched the game I was actually quite nervous, I thought that we weren't gonna win, to be honest. And then we won the game, it was like a weight lifted off my shoulders. For change... we might not have won the soccer, the cricket... but we won the rugby. So it just, like, made South Africa a better place.

Int: It made South Africa a better place?

Shanice: *Ja*, it made everybody proud, of being a South African.

'Coloured' female, Group 1, 2007

In the extract below, Xolani also constructs the event as different from South Africa's normal state of affairs. Instead of a turning point towards a future of inclusive unity, however, she interprets it clearly as a momentary break with little lasting effect: soon, *'we're starting to separate again'*.

Xolani: Well I found that I enjoyed it, because everyone had one focus. You know. This whole... like the country was together in one direction, 'cause so far we've been... everyone's badmouthing this person, so it was actually like, a unity. And even in my neighbourhood, everyone was watching the rugby and then when we won, everyone came out, to go and say, 'Did you see that, did you see that'? So I enjoyed that, that was a break so to speak, from everything else that's been happening. Yeah, I enjoyed it, it was very nice.

Int: Do you think it still lasts, this feeling of unity...?

Xolani: Yeah, there is that feeling, but ever since our coach has resigned, there have been a bit of unpleasant words been thrown around. Because the debates will come up between people, like individuals basically. Some people don't like him, some people do, and then that's where we're starting to separate again. But in whole, that was a unity moment for everyone.

African female, Group 8, 2007

## Conclusion on the 2007 talk

In the previous section I argued that the Rainbow narrative formed not only the dominant repertoire about the South African nation, but that it also had a *prospective* dimension: it is the type of nation South Africa wants to 'become' in the future. After the initial optimistic beginning, all the 2007 conversations reflected a sense of a gap between the Rainbow identity project and everyday reality as perceived by the speakers. In Chapter Four we saw how speakers wanted to bring across certain concerns about their society, but these had to be carefully negotiated, taking care not to disrupt the social harmony in the group. I saw this as an indication that the Rainbow image people were forwarding in their talk was not an accomplished project; the Rainbow Nation has not (yet) materialized around them. Inclusion is not felt by everyone to be an accomplished fact, and the perceived international image of South Africa is very different from the Rainbow identity. In their talk, we see speakers struggle with this tension. It is exactly this tension that underlies most of the debates and contestation in the focus groups.

The analysis of the talk about the Rugby World Cup further helped to illuminate this prospective character of Rainbow talk. The rugby talk was remarkably consensual and non-confrontational. For a moment, there was a perfect match between South Africa's identity project and the 'real life event' that had popped up in the frame. For that one moment, two main issues of contestation evaporated: everyone was included and South Africa was positioned internationally in the best possible way. Not only did the event bring South Africans together in society at large, but it also had a unifying effect on the relations between the focus-group participants. As we saw in the analysis, aspects of the Rugby World Cup that were a potential source of contestation – such as the racial



composition of the team – were trivialized for the sake of holding on to the euphoric unity of the moment. That the event only offered a temporal resource for the confirmation of the Rainbow identity became clear when I went back to the same schools in the winter of 2008.

## 2008: The xenophobic attacks

### Introduction

In June and July 2008, I went back to the same schools and held focus-group discussions with the same groups of learners as in 2007. This was only weeks after the May 2008 xenophobic attacks had taken place. Just like the Rugby World Cup, this was an event that dominated the national news in the period before the focus groups were held. And just like the Rugby World Cup, it was an event that became the talk of the day that impacted on the ‘national mood’ and triggered reflections on national identity. This, however, is where the resemblance ends. It is fair to say that in terms of its meaning for national identity, the second event was the direct opposite of the first. All 2008 focus groups started off with a discussion of two newspaper clippings from domestic newspapers about the attacks.<sup>55</sup>

As I recalled in Chapter One, although the May 2008 attacks were exceptionally violent and widespread, they were not the first manifestation of strong anti-foreigner sentiments in South Africa. Indeed, research has demonstrated that xenophobia has been a persistent feature of the post-apartheid dispensation (Crush 2001).<sup>56</sup> It is also a theme that touches on the ambivalences of the post-apartheid dispensation. Universally, the theme of xenophobia stands in a complex relation to the theme of nationalism and national identity (Croucher 1998). What makes this relationship particularly problematic in the South African case is the fact that South Africa’s prospective identity is explicitly based on values of inclusivity, non-racialism, non-discrimination, equality and protection of human rights. For South Africa then, xenophobic violence is a direct degradation of the nation’s founding values and therefore of its identity. The key question in my analysis is how speakers make sense of this obvious contradiction in their talk.

One important pattern in the analysis of the 2008 transcripts is the greater amount of contestation and debate in almost all focus groups, and particularly in the black-only groups. The mood of euphoric consensus has made way for agitated discussions. The

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<sup>55</sup> The main headline read: ‘*I really hate your country: foreign nationals have lost ten thousand of Rands after stock in their shops was looted*’ (Mail and Guardian 30.5.2008-05.6.2008)

<sup>56</sup> In 2010 another (smaller) wave of xenophobic violence hit South Africa (Christian Science Monitor July 21<sup>st</sup> 2010).

social harmony of the 2007 groups is no longer the dominant pattern. A lot of complex discursive work is needed to make sense of what happened and of what this means for South Africa's project identity. The event painfully lays bare the contradiction between lived reality and the project identity. It challenges Rainbow-informed constructions of South Africa as a nation and as people, and it challenges attempts to position South Africa favourably on the international level.

In my analysis I identified two distinct categories of responses to deal with these challenges. The first category is made up of those responses that attempt to uphold the Rainbow image, and deny any contradiction between this image and the event. This is done through different discursive strategies such as trivializing the attacks, justifying or rationalizing them. Through these strategies, speakers attempt to save the desired, prospective 'face' of South Africa. The second category of responses is made up of those that acknowledge the contradiction between the Rainbow Image and the event. Responses in this category range from a specific, sharp condemnation of the attacks and its perpetrators to a more generic, fatalistic discourse on South African national identity as being in crisis. These types of accounts range from acknowledging that there are some flaws in South Africa's Rainbow identity to 'giving up' on South Africa all together. It is this division into two response types – or two types of repertoires – that underlies the increased amount of contestation in the 2008 groups as compared to the 2007 groups. Each repertoire can draw from shared, publicly available but competing repertoires about issues relating to the event. On each side of the debate different interests are at stake, and different audiences are relevant (for example domestic, African or 'Western' audiences). Within groups, individual speakers may join one or the other discursive side and enter into agitated debates with other group members. However, it would be misleading to speak of two clearly demarcated, opposing sides. Instead, we see individual speakers moving from one side to the other during the course of the conversation. In my view, this only exemplifies the difficulty speakers have in trying to make sense of the events in relation to South African national identity. Remarkably, however, after having gone through a significant amount of discursive 'wrestling' during the course of the conversation, most groups manage to return to a consensus by the time the conversation comes to an end. The question of how speakers see the future of their country brings everyone back in line, and almost everyone produces an optimistic, patriotic outlook on the future of their nation in the end. These are the main overall patterns that emerged from the analysis of the 2008 transcripts. We will now examine some of these processes in context by looking at a number of selected extracts.

## Discursive strategies to deal with the event

In 2007, South Africa was predominantly described in terms of the Rainbow narrative: as a nation united in its cultural diversity, in which all are equal and none are discriminated against on the basis of their race, and as a nation defined by its hard-won freedom. Some mentioned specific African values such as '*ubuntu*' – described in Chapter Three – as a distinguishing feature of the country. South Africans as people were overwhelmingly described as friendly, welcoming, hospitable, respectful, tolerant. It is not difficult to see how constructions based on all these themes became problematic in the light of the 2008 event.

One consequence of the xenophobic attacks is that they forced speakers to renegotiate the ways in which they constructed different categories of people. This goes first of all for the category of South Africans. Can this category be constructed in a positive way despite the problematic event and, if so, how? The second category of people that is defined and redefined in the light of the xenophobic attacks is the category of the 'African Other'. As we will see, different ways of constructing the 'African Other' serve different constructions of the South African nation.

As noted, two different responses for dealing with the contradiction between the event and the prospective Rainbow identity were found. The first one was to downplay the contradiction by trivializing, justifying or rationalizing the attacks. The second one was to acknowledge the contradiction and use the event as an occasion for out-loud soul-searching.

### **Managing the international image: trivializing the attacks versus 'giving up'**

While the 2007 event could be used as a resource to rebut the negative international image of South Africa, the 2008 event had the opposite effect. It clearly damaged the international image, and speakers had to find creative ways of dealing with that challenge. From the start of the 2008 discussions, speakers across all focus groups demonstrated awareness of this reputational damage. Possibly, the tone of the newspaper clippings and my own presence as an 'outside observer' contributed to this. But beyond that, it is likely that speakers had been following the way the events had been covered by the international media. Images of violent mobs looting South African townships while carrying sjamboks and torches had been broadcast all over the world. One image in particular became symbolic for the excessive violence of the attacks: that of a Mozambican who was burned alive. Images such as these undermine the identity project of post-apartheid South Africa in a number of ways. First of all, they undermine the idea that the new South Africa is built on a clear break with its apartheid past. The

image of the burning man was reminiscent of the apartheid era, and particularly of practices of necklacing and black-on-black violence in the late 1980s (Pillay 2008:3). Secondly, they undermine South Africa's image as a beacon of tolerance and human rights protection, and its progressive constitutional ambition to be a nation that 'belongs to all who live in it'. Thirdly, the attacks might be taken in some quarters as a confirmation that South Africa is by no means an exception to the neo-colonial, stereotypical image of Africa and black Africans as endemically violent. Fourth, the attacks challenge South Africa's proclaimed ambition to foster its ties with the rest of Africa.

Many speakers chose to minimize or downplay the reputational damage by trivializing the attacks. Trivializing the attacks can be seen as an attempt to transform them from a contradiction to South Africa's prospective identity into an understandable, 'minor' side effect of socio-political developments in contemporary South Africa. Trivializing accounts emphasize that this type of violence could happen in any country, thereby denying its specific relevance for the identity of contemporary South Africa. Other speakers, by contrast, chose to acknowledge the reputational damage, thereby implicitly acknowledging that South Africa is not (yet) living up to its prospective Rainbow identity. In the extract below, Peter chooses the route of trivialization. He argues somewhat paradoxically that it is precisely because of South Africa's international image of a reconciled Rainbow nation that it is criticized disproportionately in the case of negative events:

Peter: What I'm getting at here is, um... the newspapers... because we are seen as a country that brings a unification and we're seen as a country that accepts everyone's cultures, everybody, like you said, everybody knows Nelson Mandela for... everything he did. Now, because we are seen as that, something like that happening is blown out of proportion. Because it's a new story. It's like 'arghh', it's against our whole values, it's against everything we stand for. It's a minor thing that happens, but 'pfew', look at this! Because it's happening here, it's a big thing.

Afrikaner male, Group 10, 2008

Similarly, in the other Afrikaner group, a lengthy discussion developed about how other nations were somehow 'excused' when a negative event occurred, but South Africa had always been the target of critical international media. Other speakers – particularly in the Indian school – emphasized that the violence was just incidental, and related to crime rather than symptomatic of widespread, pervasive xenophobia.

Alisha: I think that, um... at this time people are sceptical about coming here, they don't want to come here. But I think after a while it will wear off, and people will come here. And everything... they... it won't be forgotten completely, but people will move on, and... I think everything will come right. I mean... there's been no xenophobic attacks for while now, so I think it was just that time, and people were just... in a different frame of mind. And now everything is fine.

Int: You're saying there's been no xenophobic attacks for a while now.

Devan: Recently.

Alisha: Nothing that we've heard of...

Int: So this was really, sort of a...

Devan: Once-off.

Int: Once-off thing, yes.

Alisha: Yes.

Indian female, Indian male, Group 3, 2008

Upholding the prospective identity of the Rainbow Nation is not the only function of this kind of talk. In the conversations another, more pragmatic or even opportunistic goal of trivializing the attacks could be detected: that of reassuring the international community about South Africa's ability to host the 2010 Soccer World Cup. The topic of the Soccer World Cup was frequently mentioned in the context of talk on the xenophobic attacks, as in this extract from Group 7, in the mixed girls' school.

Lindsay: I feel angry when they... when they were showing all that stuff. Like, it's... it's... yeah because it's not really... obviously it's a true reflection but I mean it's, like... one event, that is now gonna... like, have a shadow on the rest... like, I mean, for years to come, this... that one picture is gonna stay there, forever. Maybe forever. And it's like, one incident. When it's all most... is it still happen... is it actually still happening now? Xenophobia?

Mpumelelo: Now they're being chased out of the camps. They were told that they had to go get permits to stay here, because if they don't they're gonna be chased out.

Busi: It's quite... [inaudible]

Int: Yeah, that was on the news, hey?

Mpumelelo: Yeah.

Lindsay: But now you see, it's not as... like, vicious and... people burning and stuff, it was a once-off thing, OK it was bad, but... it's just gonna... [arghh]... it's gonna... that image is gonna stay

about South Africa. It's gonna, like, turn against us. Something is gonna happen later on in life, and then... you know, like: 'Ja, but remember back to when that happened'.

Tracy: It already happens...

Lindsay: And it's gonna happen like for [arghh...] for so many years.

Mpumelelo: And it's just, like...

Int: What do you think then? Something is gonna turn against you? What are you thinking about?

Ntombi: I'm thinking the 2010. They might just take it away from us.

Group [sounds of agreement]: [*Yeah, exactly*].

Ntombi: That's because... they'll look at us and think: 'If you're gonna do this to people that are in your neighbouring countries, imagine all the people that are coming from all the other countries... you're gonna, like... what are you gonna do to them? Mutilate them?'

White English-speaking females, black females, Group 7, 2008

In the extract, the group members are clearly concerned about the consequences of the reputational damage. Lindsay is suggesting that the damage done to South Africa's image is actually disproportional: it was just one incident but the negative image will last for a long time. The idea clearly angers her, as underscored by the repetitive '*arghh*'. The extract further reflects the ranking of significant Others that was already discussed in Chapter Five. Concerns about the reputational damage caused by the attacks were almost always concerned with how actors in 'the West' would now look at South Africa negatively. Relocating the Soccer World Cup to another country is something that is decided on by the powerful board of FIFA: a body representing Europe, the 'West'. When Ntombi speaks about 'they', it is therefore clear that she has the 'West' in mind. Group 7 was one of the groups in which a strong condemnation of the attacks dominated, and the participants clearly sympathized with the African migrants who were its victims. Interestingly, however, they did not express a concern about the impact of the attacks on South Africa's reputation in the eyes of other African nations. Across all focus groups, concerns about a damaged image were mostly about Western perceptions of South Africa. In the extract below, a strong condemnation of the attacks combines with concerns about South Africa's international position:

Talika: Well, I was for one very shocked at this whole xenophobic attacks and everything. Because... It's not the first time the foreigners are coming in, they have been always coming... I think because of Zimbabwe as well... they're going through struggles there so they're travelling over the bor... they're crossing the border, they're coming here. But foreigners were always here. I don't know why South Africans acted like this, and they say foreigners come in... this is the most common thing... foreigners come in, the crime increases. But if you look at the newspapers and the, um... news on TV and everything... it's the... it's the South Africans that are causing the crime. They are going and... disrupting these foreigners and everything like that. So I was just shocked. That was my feeling. And... everything else, devastated and... but I didn't understand why... and especially with the World Cup coming and... it's really... not... it's not helping us at all. 'Cause... we were shaky at the start, people were having their doubts about us. Now we're just adding fuel to the fire. So I don't know.

Int: Shaky... when South Africa was granted to host the World Cup?

Talika: Not many people... even in South Africa, it was divided. Some people thought we can handle it, some people thought that we can't. Because of the crime and everything like that, and we are a Third World country after all. It's the first time that the World Cup is going to be in a Third World country. And although we are the... the... what can I say, the most economically powerful in Africa, we're still... not economically powerful enough in relation to in the rest of the world. Only in Africa, and Africa is very, like... I mean they're not well off at all. So...

Int: So you're concerned also about South Africa's image worldwide?

Talika: Mm.

Int: OK. And you say, personally you were also shocked and...

Talika: At the xenophobic attacks.

Int: It does something to your... to your pride in your country...?

Talika: Yeah. Because, I mean the first time you came here you know that, we were saying we're a friendly country, we welcome everybody in... So I... didn't know what this was about at all.

Indian female, Group 3, 2008

As in the previous extract, Talika's sympathy is with the African victims of the attacks, but her main concern is with the judgement that 'Western' nations will make in the light of the events. It is clear in this extract that the event complicates a confident, exceptionalist positioning of South Africa within Africa like that found in the 2007 transcripts. Refusing to trivialize the event, Talika is clearly at pains to resolve the contradiction, and her confusion is epitomized in the last utterance, *'I didn't know what this was about at all'*.

Understandably, speakers who explicitly condemned the attacks had a lot more trouble solving the contradiction, or ‘fixing’ the reputational damage than those who trivialized the event.<sup>57</sup> They commonly responded to the event by asking difficult, soul-searching questions, and in some cases ultimately ‘giving up’ on South Africa’s prospective identity. Instead of downplaying the contradiction between the event and the prospective identity, these speakers chose to emphasize it. They used strong words to describe what they saw as a great breach of the identity project that South Africa had signed up for. Note the contrast between describing the event as a ‘once-off incident’ and Ntombi’s words:

Int: So, would anyone like to start and just tell me what you’re thinking when you read these types of headlines?

Ntombi: I think that xenophobia became, like, the great big downfall of South Africa. In terms of how people were treated... I mean, our country, you look at it and think: ‘This is where someone could come and they won’t feel like they’re in great big danger.’ Apart from crime of course, that’s something that happens everyday. But when xenophobia hit South Africa, it was something else. It was worse than crime. Because people were being killed and people were losing their homes and...

Tracy: People said that was... could be, like, the start of a civil war. And... yeah... it could lead to bigger things.

Black female, white English-speaking female, Group 7, 2008

In the extracts below, we see speakers acknowledging the contradiction between the event and the subthemes of the Rainbow Narrative, often in combination with an explicit moral appeal against xenophobia. Dumisani, a black male in Group 2, clearly gives up on South Africa’s Rainbow Nation identity. Without that guiding, normative project, he recounts literally and personally feeling ‘lost’:

Dumisani: It’s an embarrassment to our country, not only to our country but myself personally, I feel embarrassed about what happened, so... because last time I said I’m a very... I’m very proud of South Africa, I’m very authentic about South Africa and what not, but now I am not so sure anymore. Because of this.

<sup>57</sup> It is noteworthy that explicit condemnation of the attacks was most prominent in the two groups at the girls-only, racially mixed school. In Chapter Five we saw that the image of this school emerging from the talks was that of a microcosmic, lived reality of the non-racial Rainbow Nation.



Int: And you said that there's this... It's the cultural diversity of the country that gives the country a sort of unique vibe. I think those were your words.

Dumisani: Yeah, because of the Rainbow Nation statement, whatever, so I don't feel that anymore, I just feel lost...

Black male, Group 2, 2008

The event also triggers emotional responses. Andile vividly paints a picture of the fear that foreigners are likely to be feeling about coming to South Africa after these events:

Andile: Well, I also think that, um... foreigners thinks that if you come to South Africa, it's, like, you've been thrown in, um... hell-frames. Because, if you lay your foot at the... at the land of South Africa, you will be killed. If you're lucky, you will be hit, smashed, 'til you ache... 'til you can't even move... the finger that is in your hand. Which is a very... very terrible thing to... solve. So I'm kind of... being ashamed of my country. Yeah, I could say.

Black male, Group 5, 2008

For Nombuso, of the same group, the event undermines the foundational value of 'ubuntu' and is a signal of nothing less than a national identity crisis.

Nombuso: We as South Africans, we talk about ubuntu. But what happened to ubuntu, when you kill another person? And it showed a lot of things about South Africa. We really don't know who we are. Sometimes we act as if we know it all, but inside we don't know anything.

Black female, Group 2, 2008

For Farah, an Indian speaker in Group 4, the event has nullified the Rainbow subtheme of freedom:

Farah: I think when you look at South Africa, you look at the word freedom. Right, um... when, when the xenophobic attacks came about, those people aren't looking at freedom anymore, it's like a jail.

Indian female, Group 4, 2008

In some instances the event led speakers to construct an image of the national community that was diametrically the opposite of the image they constructed in 2007. This was for instance the case with Mahindra, who had constructed South Africa as an economic giant, an exceptional country whose economic power was unrecognized by the 'Western' powers (see Chapter Five). In 2008, in the context of the attacks, he portrayed South Africa as a developing country lagging far behind the 'Western world':

Mahindra: It's hard to hide that image [of South Africa as a developing country] because we are... everyone knows that we're a third world country so, um... I don't see the reason why they [South African politicians] should be, um... hiding from help, asking for help. Because, um... everyone can see that we're a third world country, and especially now, if, um... if we are killing people because they're foreign to us, and we don't understand them, it shows that we are lacking, we are nowhere near what other countries in Europe, or America, Australia... we are far behind.

Indian male, Group 4, 2008

At the same time, paradoxically, it is South Africa's exceptional position that is believed by many to make the country a magnet for the rest of Africa. This factor is brought up in the rationalizing accounts on the attacks that I will discuss below.

### **Time: the event takes us backwards in time**

For some speakers, the event represented such a strong 'breach' of the prospective identity project of post-apartheid South Africa that it could only be interpreted as a step backwards in time, back to what the 'old' South Africa stood for:

Busi: What's really sad is that, like... South Africa's come such a long way from, like, the whole discrimination thing. Like... with the whole apartheid. And it's sort of, like, we've... it's built our image. It's, like, over... from other countries they'll look at us and think OK, well, they're getting somewhere. And then, like... it's like starting all over again, like, how people have to now discriminate against, like... other people in our country, and it's sad, 'cause, I mean, we're trying so hard, like South Africa's trying, like, to get away from that process, and it's, like, going straight back to it, and it's just sad.

Black female, Group 7, 2008

Int: Mmm, OK. And when you think about African Renaissance and African solidarity, then... how... what does that mean now, after... when these types of things happen?

Lihle: It's just going back... I don't think we're embracing all of that, we're just going back to the past, to all the bad things that used to happen. That's what I think.

Int: To the apartheid days?

Lihle: Yes, we're just bringing it down, it's... it's just that it's different now, it's not white people against black people, now it's our own black people against... other black people... Yes, that's what I think.

Black female, Group 8, 2008

Making sense of the xenophobic attacks on Africans from neighbouring countries is particularly difficult in the light of history: in the apartheid era, neighbouring countries

offered shelter to members of the resistance movements. In the interviews, we can see how speakers give different meanings to these historical facts – how they selectively interpret them – in order to serve their specific identity projects:

Bryan: Well my... my thoughts is... if they've done it legally and that, then yeah, sure, then they have the right of being here. I mean anybody can go anywhere as long as they do it legally. But if they do it illegally then, they're just trying to escape their own problems. When they should just battle... sit and do... stay in their own countries and battle it out. Like we've said... like they were saying earlier on about the apartheid. You didn't see people jumping up and running off to other countries here from South Africa.

Lungile: Not as much.

Bryan: They certainly battled it out.

Int: Some learners I spoke to in other schools, they said the opposite. They said: We've been going to Zambia... Zimbabwe...

Bryan: Legally...

Lungile: That was legally, and it was for a good cause. It was...

Lindiwe: Meetings of the ANC and all that stuff.

Fundi: Education, ANC or...

Lungile: It wasn't to run away, basically. They weren't running away. They were trying to fix the problem.

Fundi: They wanted to fight for our country.

Lindiwe: They were trying to find solutions of...

Lungile: Trying to find solutions in other... trying to find help from other countries and things like that. It wasn't like... it wasn't like they were running away from the problem.

White English-speaking male, black male, black females, Group 1, 2008

In the extract above, the speakers in Group 1 consensually develop a particular interpretation of the history of anti-apartheid activists finding refuge in neighbouring countries to serve their specific construction of the African migrant as an illegal, opportunistic, economic fortune seeker. Below, we see Lihle draw on the same historical fact to accomplish the opposite – constructing the African migrant as a political refugee that is entitled to solidarity from South Africans:

Int: And so... how do you feel towards those South Africans that were behind these attacks?

Lihle: I think I... I'm ashamed of them, I don't like being... that they're my own countrymen and they treat other people like that. I think, um... when our own freedom fighters needed places for shelter, when they were oppressed here, they're, like... the people in the other countries allowed us to go in and... when they need our help, we're all negative towards them and everything. I'm very ashamed.

Black female, Group 8, 2008

### **Justifying and rationalizing the attacks**

In addition to trivializing, speakers attempted to maintain a positive image of their nation in the face of the event by justifying or rationalizing the xenophobic attacks. The dataset shows a repetitive pattern of commonsensical repertoires mobilized for that purpose, echoing the repertoires found in studies of the public and political discourse on immigration in South Africa (Crouchner 1998, Crush 2001, Pederby 1999). The most widely used is the repertoire that emphasizes the pressure African migrants put on the labour market: African migrants are 'stealing the jobs of South Africans'. In the extract below, we see Gugu reproducing this line of argument:

Gugu: When it first... this thing, it first started, I was... yeah, I don't know... I would say, I was childish, because [inaudible] happy, was, like, 'Ja...let's do this', you know... you know why... [laughs], I don't know why... but then as it went on I saw it was serious, because the thing is, um... besides the people who are uneducated in South Africa, who don't have jobs, there are those who are educated. But then, these people, um... go, like, fighting or protesting for a better life, better salaries and stuff... and then you go out there, you protest and then there's other people who come into your space. Who are willing to take in, say, 40 Rand a day. I mean you can't make a living on 40 Rand. So... as a... a clear example would be in Durban when this xenophobic thing was happening, in the salons, girls were... Zulu... like black girls from South Africa, went to salons and told... and took out all the other girls from other countries. Because now those girls they... they get there, they take 20 Rand a day, I mean, imagine if you were to do like five or seven hairdos a day and then get twenty Rand, and then when I'm trying to go out there and stop it out and protest, and the you... um... to get better money or, wages, and then you come in there and you... you just take that 20 Rand a day, now what is that saying? I'm losing my job over nothing. So... I'd say... I say I was for the xenophobic thing until it got out of hand, and got to hitting and burning people.

Int: OK, but you can understand then where the South Africans were coming from?

Gugu: Why are they so angry, and mad.

Black female, Group 2, 2008

Gugu is locating the underlying causes for the xenophobic violence in the socio-economic sphere – the dramatic levels of unemployment among South African poor and African migrants accepting wages below the legally defined minimum. The function of this line of argument could be to rationalize the motives of the perpetrators and this way decrease the contradiction between their behaviour and the construction of South Africans in line with the Rainbow narrative. Gugu does however draw a line when it comes to concrete acts of violence: ‘hitting and burning people’ is something she cannot support or justify. By doing this, she constructs a distinction between justifiable anti-African foreigner sentiments and unjustifiable excessively violent acts. Apart from the argument of African migrants putting pressure on the labour market, Gugu’s account reflects another repertoire that directly has to do with the South African nation-building project. As Pederby wrote: ‘The promise of resource and service delivery and equal access to state resources is intrinsic to the post-apartheid state’s nation-building project’. Immigrants, she argues, are seen as a threat to resource and service delivery and therefore a threat to the nation-building project itself (Pederby 1999:24). As we saw in Chapter Three, concerns about service delivery contributed to an increasingly negative ‘national mood’ during the second term of Mbeki’s presidency. It is clear that these concerns feed into Gugu’s account, which reflects the idea that the new dispensation holds the promise of ‘a better life’ for unemployed, impoverished South Africans. South Africans were thus rightfully and peacefully protesting to achieve that, until African migrants came ‘into their space’. Gugu’s literal reference to space, and the suggestion of the ‘Other’ moving into your space, also echoes the strong spatial dimension of the boundaries of exclusion. Speakers who justify the attacks construct a range of different negative descriptions of the African Other. At best, the African Other is described as someone accepting any type of salary and intending to settle in South Africa permanently, a ‘taker’ not a ‘giver’ (Pederby 1999). At worst he is described as illegal, unhealthy and criminal. The exceptionalism discourse offers a good framework for these characterizations of the African Other – the African migrant who is drawn from the impoverished wastelands of Africa to the ‘land of milk and honey’ at the bottom of the continent, only to bring problems, crime and disease:

Buhle: Some foreigners come with drugs in our country.

Int: With drugs? OK.

Buhle: So... I think it was the... one of... main cause why they hit them... yes. So ma’am, I don’t say... it was a good idea but... it’s wrong, foreigners come with drugs in our country.

Andile: Mm, to add, on the point of Buhle, I might say, *amaForeigners*, when they come to our country, they try to destroy youth by coming with drugs, 'cause our youth... actually they like to be involved and then addictive to *amaDrugs*, so... which is wrong. That's what destroy, um... the most of us, as South Africans, 'cause... some of us don't... think before we do things, we just do it for fun, and do it for what, um... friends does... no... that's all I could say.

Int: OK. So foreigners bring... bring those things into the country?

Andile: Yeah.

Black males, Group 5, 2008

A very strong trope in justifying accounts was the theme of 'illegality'. This notion, derived from the universal discourse on citizenship and territorial integrity, offers an ideal resource for speakers across all focus groups to rationalize the attacks. This echoes tendencies in political discourse to construct all African immigrants as illegals, with illegality often being equated with criminality (Pederby 1999:24):

Lungile: The foreigners came into the country; they're not registered, for one. So I think that's one of the things that irritated and pushed the people to what they... to... to being violent and, and, and... like... hitting on, like, the... the foreign people, 'cause the government for one, they... they know that people come over, 'cause it's not the first time that you find out that people coming and they're finding jobs here and they work like this but... at one point this is becoming too much.

Black male, Group 1, 2008

In all this we see the inevitable 'dark side' of nation-building. Building an inclusive collective identity is by definition simultaneously about exclusion. Inclusion is the trademark of the post-apartheid nation-building project, but it is a selective inclusion: strict boundaries of exclusion are drawn through the criterion of citizenship. Those who do not hold the documented proof of citizenship become the new, excluded Other. These processes of exclusion are not simply a regrettable side effect of nation building; they are a constitutive element of it. This is clearly visible in the interviews. Talk that builds on the 'stealing jobs' repertoire is interspersed with references to 'us', 'our South African people', 'our own people'. The contrasting between South Africans and African migrants in these instances facilitates assertions of a collective national identity.

Chris: I think it's... the xenophobia thing is probably right. I don't know they... people... foreigners coming into our land, taking the jobs of our South Africans, the killings and stuff... I don't know. I think it's right.

Afrikaner male, Group 9, 2008

In this twisted way the theme of xenophobia becomes a resource for national identity construction. It is noteworthy that anti-foreigner sentiments are almost exclusively targeted at African foreigners. Speakers commonly made a distinction between African immigrants and other immigrants, constructing a type of hierarchy of desired immigrants. In clear contrast to the African immigrant, immigrants from 'Western' nations were categorized as 'creators of opportunity':

Bryan: You said that, what if Americans came. But Americans come from a much more developed country so they are most likely gonna come here and start something that are gonna create a lot more jobs for us South Africans.

Lungile: And also, they are gonna come here legally, not illegally.

Bryan: Yes.

White English-speaking male, black male, Group 1, 2008

Int: Mandla, you have some thoughts on that?

Mandla: Um... [laughs]... no, I just think there's two types of foreigner. The contributor and the one who comes here, like... illegally, with a lot of children and... you know, who doesn't have... who's unemployed... you know, who adds on to straining the economy of South Africa, you know... And those... those are the types of two foreigners and yeah...

Black male, Group 1, 2008

Across the dataset, many speakers forwarded the view that sentiments against African foreigners were justified to a certain extent. This was openly articulated by speakers across racial or class backgrounds. I took this as an indication that this is perceived as an accepted, commonsensical argument to make. This is remarkable in light of the normative character of the Rainbow narrative as described in Chapter Five. In that light, we would expect xenophobic expressions to be so clearly counter-normative that uttering them would require careful negotiation, similar to the negotiation of other deviations from the Rainbow narrative. In the dataset I did not find evidence of speakers' awareness of a breach of normative discourse. Support for the xenophobic attacks was commonly done quite openly and explicitly, with speakers seemingly unconcerned about any norms against prejudice. This however should not be read as if xenophobic expressions were left uncontested in the group.

## Fierce debates and switching sides

As I stated previously, in several groups a debate emerged between those justifying and those condemning the attacks. This debate was particularly strong in Group 6, one of the two groups in the township school. The following, long stretch of talk from this group is taken up here to demonstrate the ways in which different meanings are contested and negotiated within the conversation:

Int: [...] Can foreigners, in general, can foreigners at some point become part of South Africa?

Mike: Yes. If they would come to the country legally. Maybe we could become this... that united family. But no, these guys are coming illegally, they're crossing the border by using, like, transport from... from our police services, they're... they are those guys who, like... who like want to gain money out of them, who like come to that foreigner, 'OK, I'll take you inside South Africa, without being seen, if you pay me this amount of cash'. And then after he has got paid, he takes him in and then... and then he enters South Africa, in that illegal way. I think you know that when... when you take off and live in another country, you're supposed to have, like... I think it's a pass or maybe a...

Zandile: Passport...

Mike: Passport. Or maybe there's this document that you must sign, maybe must sign after a couple weeks or maybe months like, so on... but the country has to know that they have a foreigner in... inside, living in the country.

Int: Yes, OK, so...

Zandile: But there's also possibility that South African... and other countries, like foreigners... who could never be a family, because South Africans think that foreigners come to the country and steal their jobs. Because...

Mike: That's exactly what they're doing.

Zandile: Actually they're not... in the... that... [inaudible]

Mike: That's exactly what they're doing.

Int: You think that's what they are doing, they're stealing jobs?

Zandile/Fundi: *[No, actually they're not!]*

Zandile: They're creating... they're using their hands...

Fundi: Actually it's where... it's...

Int: You disagree there, hey?



Zandile: Yeah, disagree.

Fundi: Actually most black people, maybe their boss will say, 'I'll pay you 20 Rand a day or 20 rand a week', then the black person won't take it, but a foreigner will, 'cause that's big money for them.

Zandile: Into their countries...

Fundi: In their countries. So a foreigner will take that... that job.

Zandile: And foreigners are hard workers. Not like us.

Mike: They're not hard workers.

Zandile: A black person won't... won't say I will.

[Everyone talks at same time]

Black male, black females, Group 6, 2008

There is a lot going on in this stretch of talk. First of all, it is remarkable that Mike is positioning himself on the side of the debate that justifies and rationalizes the attacks through repertoires of the illegal and job-stealing African Other. In the 2007 conversation, when the theme of xenophobia already came up spontaneously in this group, Mike took the exact opposite position, the one formulated by Zandile and Fundi here. Against the backdrop of the Rainbow-confirming rugby euphoria, Mike apparently felt comfortable enough to express some self-criticism of his own national community. He constructed African migrants primarily as political refugees entitled to asylum in South Africa. By contrast, in 2008 he opted to 'defend' his own fellow South Africans by justifying the attacks and emphasizing illegality in his construction of the African Other. His reference to '*that united family*' could be seen as a nod to pan-African solidarity, but that ideal is clearly subordinated to the idea of South African territorial integrity and the controlling of the influx of migrants. This time, however, other members of the focus group – Zandile and Fundi – formulate the more self-critical position. For them, the discussion triggers a critical redefinition of the own category of South Africans, whom they implicitly construct as lazy, and later in the conversation as vain.<sup>58</sup> For the moment, a positive construction of

<sup>58</sup> Note the interesting use of the term 'black' by these girls. In their accounts, 'black' signifies a black South African, but deliberately not a black African. As Neocosmos writes about this phenomenon: 'blackness' is only stressed vis-à-vis whites, not in relation to other Africans (2008: 591).

the African migrant serves that project. But, in that, the two females are not consistent: during the conversation they easily shift between qualifications of African migrants as criminal versus hard-working and modest. Self-critiquing their own category of South Africans is a common strategy among speakers who choose to condemn the attacks. They respond to the event by acknowledging the flaws in the prospective Rainbow image of their nation and its nationals, and by out-loud soul-searching about that shattered image:

Ntombi: There's, like, an organisation type of thing of salons that have been opened here in Pietermaritzburg, and they're owned by foreigners. And there are numerous numbers of people from PMB that are... working for them. So they're creating jobs. They're not taking jobs away from people. I believe that people that said... that they have come to steal jobs from them, are the people that are sitting on their backsides... not doing anything with their lives...

*[Several speakers: They're not doing anything with their lives... that's right].*

Ntombi: And they're just pointing fingers.

Busi: Yeah.

Ntombi: Which is really... really wrong.

Busi: Yeah, I'm sure that's how it started...

Ntombi: They are just lazy.

Black females, Group 7, 2008

When we place this extract in the broader context of the conversation in this particular, middle class girls school, the position Ntombi and Busi take does not come as a surprise. The conversation reflects an ethos, an ideology of individual responsibility for upward mobility. The black girls in this group –who are successfully climbing the social ladder despite their township background – personify this ethos, and draw a boundary between themselves and those fellow nationals who are 'waiting for a hand-out'. In this case, the event of the xenophobic attacks thus leads to the drawing of internal divisions. It is important to stress that the boundaries between the two sides of the debate – those defending and those condemning the attacks – are not static. Indeed, individual speakers are seen to be switching sides during the course of the conversation, suggesting that the process of making sense of the events is continuous and dynamic, and attuned to the turn that the conversation is taking. This is evident in the following two extracts that feature Bryan in Group 1 speaking at two different moments in the conversation:

Int: Bryan, what do you think about this?

Bryan: Yeah, I was gonna bring out the same thing that Lindiwe did about the jobs and that. Um, yeah, like... I don't know it's a... um... someone came up just now and said that we could have handled it better, we could have done that. We could have handled it much better than what we did. We... for instance, for example we could have just packed them up and told them to go home, send them back to their countries.

White English-speaking male, Group 1, 2008

At the end of the conversation, we see him cross to the opposite side. This is after the conversation had addressed the issue of South Africans emigrating to other countries in search of better job opportunities:

Bryan: You know, um, I actually... this whole xenophobic thing, I think people acted too quickly. They didn't give it time to grow. Maybe... maybe this thing could have actually benefited us South Africans, but people didn't give it that time, they just acted. As soon as it came out, they acted.

Int: What could have benefited South Africa?

Bryan: You... maybe these guys, these guys that came from overseas, maybe they had clever ideas, maybe they could have helped bigger companies, you know, and then these bigger companies could have opened up and sky-rocket... sky-rocket.

White English-speaking male, Group 1, 2008

## Racial differentiation in responses to the event

When it comes to racial differentiation of responses to the event, the main thing to note is that the two opposite sides of the debate were each represented by speakers from every racial background. I did not find a clear-cut pattern in the relation between a speakers' racial background and his or her position regarding the event. However, what did emerge from the analysis is that speakers from different racial backgrounds had certain different resources or repertoires available to make sense of the event, in addition to the repertoires that were drawn on by speakers of all racial groups.

Because the xenophobic attacks were a case of black-on-black violence, it was easier for non-black speakers to position themselves as being at a distance from the events. This was specifically the case for those speakers who in 2007 claimed not to have a strong sense of transcendent, non-racial national identity. For them, the event did not seem to directly affect their own sense of identity, which allowed them to take an aloof, almost indifferent approach:

Conrad: No, yeah, I agree with all them, I just wanna tell one story. I know one of my friends, he went up to... to the most Northern... close to Zimbabweans' borders. There's a like... a wild reserve or something...

Marius: Yeah, like a hunting farm or... wild...

Conrad: And while they were hunting, a few Zimbabweans jump over the fence. And those Zulu... [inaudible, Afrikaans word]

*Group: Guys...*

Conrad: Guys... the guys went and they caught them and they beat them up, but they beat them up, like... really bad, just to, like, let them know, and then they call the cops. But they first teach them a lesson, just to, like... I don't know... to tell them that they mustn't do this again. Just so that they feel...

Int: OK, and what do you think about that?

Conrad: Um... I think like most of us here, we don't actually... we don't actually get hurt, or, we don't get any... it doesn't affect us.

Marius: Yeah, and we don't understand, 'cause we...

Conrad: Yeah, 'cause we're still living away from all that. And we're not part of that. So we don't actually have any effects of it or anything, so...

Afrikaner males, Group 9, 2008

The interpretation of the violence formulated by Cecilia, in the other Afrikaner group, echoes the idea of tribal strife being common between African peoples:

Cecilia: Maybe it's a personal thing between, like, the foreigners and the Zulus, like, what's it, Nigerians and the Zulus... maybe it's, like, a... you know... yeah.

Int: You mean that it's not shared by other South Africans, non-Zulus? These feelings?

Cecilia: No, I think a... a personal thing between the Zulus and the Nigerians.

Afrikaner female, Group 10, 2008

By contrast, this distancing strategy is no option for Lourie, who positions himself as a 'new-age Afrikaner'. Throughout the focus groups, he promotes an inclusive version of South Africanness, stressing identity resources that are shared by all South Africans regardless of race. When faced with the xenophobic attacks, he refrains from interpreting the event as a distant 'black-on-black issue' like his fellow group members do, as this

would imply abandoning the collective, non-racial identity. Instead, he tries out an alternative way to reconcile the event with his optimistic Rainbow narrative: placing the attackers outside of the national community and presenting the attacks as ‘un-South African’. This way, Lourie redraws the boundaries of the national community so as to exclude the attackers:

Lourie: I don’t think it’s a South African thing to do. To put it this way. I don’t think... and it... quite honestly, I would say that the people who attack them... who attack them aren’t South African. It’s not a South African trait, to... attack someone. But I understand the frustration... I also understand the frustration, *ja*.

Afrikaner male, Group 10, 2008

For black speakers, the fact that the attacks were a case of ‘black-on-black violence’ was a very different type of resource, calling for different discursive strategies. For many, it was triggering expressions of confusion and out-loud soul-searching:

Int: What do you think about that? What happened and... how does it make you feel?

Jabulani: It makes me feel bad. Because of seeing black people hitting another black people, yeah. Yeah.

Int: Is it something that, um... particularly because it’s black people hitting black people, it makes you feel bad?

Jabulani: Yes.

Int: ‘Cause you were not expecting that?

Jabulani: Yes.

Precious: They’re like brothers and sisters.

Int: They’re like brothers and sisters?

Precious: They’re like brothers and sisters. Because... our skin is the same, and... we differ from the languages that we speak...

Int: The language is the only difference?

Precious: Is the only difference.

Zandile: Not all of them are innocent.

Black male, black females, Group 6, 2008

Interesting in this extract is the use of the terms ‘brothers and sisters’. By using these terms, Precious constructs a sense of pan-African collective identity. Her pan-African collective identity is clearly based on racial markers, on having the same skin colour. It is telling that across all transcripts, African migrants were only referred to as kin by black speakers. For Precious, the fact that foreigners speak another language is no reason to exclude them from the collective African identity. This is a poignant detail in her account. As the story went, African migrants were identified during the attacks through language, on the basis of being unable to speak a South African language. Additionally, black skin colour has been used as a marker of exclusion, by assuming that Africans from north of the Limpopo have darker skins than South African blacks. These types of contradictions reveal much about the ambivalent attitude of black South Africans towards the rest of Africa. That ambivalence is exemplified by Zandile’s stinging remark at the end of the extract.

### **Interpreting the event within an Africanist framework**

In Chapter Five we saw that Group 2 was the group that most explicitly formulated Africanist interpretations of South Africa, and frequently drew racialized boundaries between white and black South African communities. It is interesting to see how this ideological positioning intersects with the event. It leads to a particularly intense and complex process of soul-searching in this group. For example, if we zoom in on Bongani, we will see how he is being torn between two ideological positions in the course of the conversation. In the initial round of reactions to the event he positions himself in the familiar way – emphasizing the themes of the labour market and illegality and arguing for the strong policing of South Africa’s borders.

Further on in the conversation, however, he shifts to the more ‘Africanist’ camp, presumably pushed in that direction by the tone of the conversation, in which Nombuso has been strongly promoting the African solidarity argument. In the extract below, Bongani is emphasizing how the event contradicts the project identity of the new South Africa being based on a breach with the past. At the same time, he constructs a racialized pan-African identity to add volume to his condemnation of the attacks:

Bongani: My second point is that, um... to other countries and other, like... places, when they look at us, and if they know the history of South Africa being, like... the oppression, like the past, like the racism and stuff like that. If they know that we’ve come past that, having white and black... like racism and stuff like that, if they say... if we went through that, why are we going back, but now only facing our own...

Nombuso: People...

Bongani: Our own people, our own colour of skin, like our brothers, like that. So now they looking at us and say, what we're doing is going against what we said...

Nombuso: Contradicting...

Bongani: Yes, we're contradicting, and we're fighting against ourselves now, 'cause as brothers we're supposed to be helping each other. But now we're just going against each other. So it's kind of... like...

Black male, black female, Group 2, 2008

Njabulo for his part responds by confronting Bongani with his contradictory position:

Njabulo: OK. Um... Going back to what Bongani said, um, I actually disagree what he's saying, 'cause he's contradicting himself, um... in terms of... firstly, in his first point, he said, they should, like, enter legally, um... as for the people from overseas and all that, they enter leg... legally in this country and all that. Um... actually in the sec... in his second point he said we should help one another as brothers, right? How can we help people whom are... experiencing a problem, as in, like, financially? How can we help them, except for... except for letting them into our country as in, like, not... as in, like, letting them to our country and not paying their fees or whatever you call it? 'Cause we are brothers and sisters, as he called it, right? And those people from other countries, they are from overseas and all that, right? Since we're from the same continent, why can't we help one another?

Black male, Group 2, 2008

For Nombuso, the most outspoken proponent of Africanism in the group, the event is an occasion to again draw clear racialized boundaries between black and white. She laments the fact that it is precisely African 'brothers and sisters' that are targeted, while South Africans tend to 'jump when white people come'. In her account, the event merely brought into focus what had always been the case – South Africans of different race groups have never been united:

Nombuso: And the white people in this country are enjoying this, because what... what's...

Int: Enjoying this?

Nombuso: Yes, because it's funny when... when the xenophobic attacks happened, the... the white people who are still in South Africa did everything to make sure that those people that were attacked got shelter, got food, got everything, and my mother was like 'ohohohooo'.

Int: Is that... oh is that so, I didn't know that.

Nombuso: And it was... they were, like, 'Huh?, where are the black people here?' We... are the... we are the oppressors now. And the white... and the white people are doing something good for... for once. Which... which was really totally wrong.

Bongani: It's just like a strategic move.

Nombuso: Yes.

Bongani: They watch, like, like they watch us... like, hit and kill each other, and then, when everything dies down, they step in and...

Nombuso: They wanna get the praise.

Bongani: Yeah, and seem like they're the good people who actually care and they wanna help...

Int: So these kinds of events, I mean, they also cause division within South African society? It sounds like it.

Bongani: Yes.

Nombuso: It's already have...

Gugu: Division has always been there. We have always been divided.

Black females, black male, Group 2, 2008

This outspoken acknowledgement of the 'failure' of the multicultural, non-racial Rainbow identity was characteristic to this group, both in 2007 and in 2008. What makes the 2008 event so complex for this group is that it also shatters the ambition of a competing identity project, that of a collective pan-African identity, and of an African renaissance:

Nombuso: And... I don't understand because we have been a united country where it doesn't matter whether you speak Xhosa, doesn't matter if you speak Zulu, Thonga, Tswana, Sesotho, it didn't matter. But now, the president is Xhosa. Everyone jumps. 'Oh hell no, he's Xhosa. If it's Zulu, "Oh he's uneducated, Oh hell no..." If it's Sotho "ooooooh..., they know nothing..." if it's white, there will be trouble. So South Africa... South Afr... the country... as a whole is confused, and it's starting to be... it's starting... Africa... Africa as a whole is starting to be a dark continent. Because everyone is really... blind. We can't see anything, we can't see where we're going, because we don't remember where we're coming from. Even... Nelson Mandela, when he spoke he said that people should remember where they're coming from. They should stop this nonsense, fighting over power. Power will go. It's just... it's just a... it's a [inaudible] thing. People are just crazy.

Int: Mmm. Anyone here want to respond?



Bongani: It's Africans.

Int: It's Africans?

Bongani: Black people. Fighting for power. They want all of it. You know. They want all of... for themselves to... to rule and control and... and... call the shots. To a new power situation [badly audible].

Int: So... OK, well, maybe in some of the Western... European... well, whatever Europe, US... there's this image of Africans, I mean that's precisely the image some people may have of Africa.

Bheka: Fighting against each other?

Int: Yes.

Bongani: We just... In other words we just prove that right. If they... if they looked at the xenophobic attacks they just said 'Oh, they just proved us right right there. They are fighting against each other.'

Black female, black males, Group 2, 2008

In this extract, we see the speakers openly giving up on the identity project of the African Renaissance, of the elevation of the African continent and the firm rejection of Western meta-stereotypes of Africa as a continent of failure, crime and warfare.

## **This is not the country we are supposed to be**

In the analysis of the talk on the rugby triumph, it was clear that the event represented a perfect match between the present and the prospective identity of South Africa as a reconciled, successful Rainbow Nation. I also argued that this sense of a match was only momentary, providing a fleeting glimpse of the type of nation that South Africa strives to become. The 2008 event has the opposite effect: it revealed the gap between the prospective future identity and the present, and shed light on the utopian dimension of that prospective identity. In the 2008 interviews, speakers were seen to be openly struggling with this gap. Some responded by holding onto the utopian image against all the odds:

Mike: The only thing I can say is that, we are not all bad. There are those who... there are those few people who would like to, maybe, like, start corruption and all that stuff. But we are not all bad. I would say most... most of South Africans, are actually nice, they're kind, welcoming... mmm.

Black male, Group 6, 2008

Zanele: Yeah, um... to conclude, um... what they all said, I also do believe that, um... South Africa, we're like a... a family, and when... that's what people like, you know... want from other countries as well. Because, despite... the poverty and... the rights and laws that they have, we are more welcoming and you'd want to live here in South Africa because you can, um... you'll make a family, you're welcome, you can, um... get a job and your life can be... practically different from what you can live, like, you know? Make your life more, like... develop your own life in South Africa. And just... grow out of, um... what the... in Somalia and Zimbabwe and stuff. Like how people in Zimbabwe, like, come here, to live, get jobs here, because... it's better than... where they are. So, yeah, we are more welcoming and there's more opportunities here. As well.

Int: But now after these xenophobic attacks happened, do you think the image has changed? Do you think Africans still look at South Africa as a welcoming country?

Group: No.

Zanele: Because most of the South Africans here want them to leave. Because... thinking that they're taking away businesses, um... they're making more money, and, um... they're not making them feel welcome as they are supposed to. So, yeah, it has changed.

Black female, Group 4, 2008

Zanele continues to hold onto the Rainbow image of South Africa as a united, welcoming land of opportunity, even though the conversation had already been covering the xenophobic attacks at great length. Only when I explicitly confront her with the event, does she acknowledge the gap. Of particular interest is her use of the words '*supposed to*': this was done by many speakers across the dataset. Through the use of this term, speakers were continuing to invest in the Rainbow identity, while acknowledging that the reality was not in line with it. It revealed the imperative dimension of the Rainbow identity – it is not just who we want to be, but who we are *supposed to* be:

Zandile: [...] South Africa is well known for being... an oppressed country. And now, since the other people come from other countries, they are oppressing the other people, which is not supposed to be happening because, for a South African, you're supposed to, like... treat the other person equally, because you are the one who was oppressed before, so how can you do something that you didn't want happening to you... so that statement really de... it degrades the country and we've come a long way from... from being oppressed to being a democratic country. And... really not right for other... for other people coming to the country, they're running from their country because they cannot live there peacefully, and equally, and the same thing is happening here in South Africa.

Black female, Group 6, 2008

## Maintaining the Rainbow identity against the odds

Perhaps the most remarkable and unexpected pattern found in the 2008 transcripts was the way in which the majority of speakers ended the conversation on a positive note about their national identity. Statements reflecting a sense of ‘loving South Africa against the odds’ were widely expressed across all groups. This was the case for speakers who had opted to trivialize or justify as much as for those who condemned the attacks. Solving the contradiction between the event and the prospective identity was thus not a prerequisite for a positive end balance. Two speakers in Group 7 who had unanimously condemned the xenophobic attacks, chose the following words:

Int: [...] Does anybody want to, maybe as a final thought, you know, tell me how all of this affects your feeling of national identity as a South African? Or anything else you want to say as a last... thought of the day?

Tracy: My conclusion would be that I... I love where I come from and I wouldn't want to leave it. But if I had to, then I would. If it really came to that desperate stages then I would have to. In order to protect my family or... if I was that old [laughs] or... you know what I mean, yeah. But that's me.

Londi: I also love South Africa despite all the negativity, I still love South Africa.

White English-speaking female, black female, Group 7, 2008

Tracy's utterance reflects two emotions at the same time. Firstly, she articulates a strong sense of national identity and belonging. However, this sense seems to be inevitably intertwined with a sense of uncertainty, and is not strong enough to stay in South Africa unconditionally: *'If it really came to that desperate stages then I would have to.'* The impression I got from the overall empirical analysis is that South African national identity is -for these speakers- indissolubly linked to immediate, critical events. It shows a capricious pattern, moving from a positive event, through a negative event, to yet another positive event in the future. In formulating their final thoughts about the 2008 conversation, many speakers used the upcoming event of the 2010 Soccer World Cup as a resource for their optimism against the odds. This is clear in the following quote:

Int: Last time some of you were quite... said it was important to be proudly South African, hey? And... some of you were quite optimistic about the future of South Africa. Has that... have your views changed now?

Mandla: Definitely not.

Lungile: They have changed but...

Int: Wait, not all at the same time. You're saying definitely not, Mandla?

Mandla: No, definitely not.

Int: Not. You still look the same way...?

Mandla: Yeah, just because of a violent set-back that we... I don't know whether I should say we or they... attacked foreigners, doesn't mean that now we can't look forward to the 2010, we can't look forward to the fact that we are home to the most powerful politician who ever lived, Nelson Mandela. I still think that, OK, fine, we did make a mistake by attacking them, by dealing with them illegally and in a barbaric way, but still, I mean, it's our country, we've built it for more than ten years, after that thingy, apartheid, and all of that.

Int: Yeah. So you're still proud. And you, Lungile, you're not, or you are?

Lungile: No, I agree with him, it is a minor set-back, but we can still change the people from outside the country's minds about South Africa.

Mandla: 'Cause even the thingy, the rates of tourists who are coming to the country, who are... who are, like, contributing, like, in a major percentage, in a major way, it's only decreased by five to nine percent. The thingy.

Black males, black female, Group 1, 2008

For 'ambassador' Mandla, in the scheme of all things, the xenophobic attacks were '*just a minor set-back*', a '*thingy*': certainly no reason for South Africa to go off the rails leading into a successful future, in which the 2010 Soccer World Cup loomed large. For others, who were less certain, the 2010 World Cup represented the next benchmark moment for South Africa's progress into that future and for personal commitment to the nation:

Busi: I'm hoping in 2010 it's gonna be good...

Lindsay: I just hope I won't change my mind about South Africa... I hope I'll like it forever, I don't know...

Int: Mmm?

Lindsay: I hope I'll like South Africa forever.

Busi: I think if 2010 goes well, then...

Mpumelelo: Then everyone will be... just saying 'no...'

Lindsay: It'll bring unity.

Black females, White English-speaking female, Group 7, 2008

In this process of moving from one event to the next – making sense of what occurs on an everyday level – the formal, normative discourse of South Africa as a Rainbow Nation offers an ideological compass. It provides some certainty and continuity – this is where we want to go in the future regardless of what happens in the present – and stable thematic resources for the discursive construction of South African national identity.

## **Conclusion: national identity talk in the context of critical events**

The empirical analysis of the talk on these two events resulted in one particularly important insight, an insight that corresponds to the theoretical ideas on the strategic nature of national identity expressions discussed in Chapter Two. Analyzing identity talk in the context of these two momentary, very distinct events turned out to be a good way to demonstrate the *prospective* quality of South African national identity talk. This was particularly so when comparing the 2007 talk, flavoured by the joyful rugby event, with the 2008 talk that was overshadowed by an event of such a different nature. Following other authors, I argued in Chapter Two that expressions of identity are as much about who we are as they are about who we want to become. In this context, I recalled Ricoeur's statement that 'that which we call ourselves is also which we await and which we are not yet' (quoted in Reicher and Hopkins 2001:42). Through their identity claims people are not necessarily describing the present social reality as they see it, but rather promoting a version of social reality and social relations they wish to see in the future. Versions of the future social reality are multiple and can be contested, as people with different projects will propose different versions of their own identity and that of others (Reicher 2004:935). However, detecting this future oriented, prospective dimension empirically is challenging because speakers will often talk as if they are describing an already existing identity – a version of the social world as it is – instead of how they want it to be.

The national identity talk analyzed in Chapter Five strongly reproduced the formal, official political repertoire of South Africa as a Rainbow Nation based on non-racialism and equality. Its widespread use suggested this repertoire is indeed part of common sense. That this image of South Africa as a Rainbow Nation is more a future-oriented project than a description of the present was implicitly made clear in Chapter Five. It revealed itself for instance in those extracts where speakers first formulated a Rainbow version of their nation and then moved on to deviate from that version with examples from their own present reality. What really brought the prospective nature of national identity claims into full focus was the analysis of the talk about the two distinct events in Chapter

Six. In this analysis, a picture clearly emerged of national identity being imagined across a line of linear progress: from the apartheid past, through the ambivalent present, into a utopian future of a truly non-racial Rainbow Nation.

The first thing to note about the Rugby World Cup triumph of 2007 is that the event provided an ideal resource for the promotion of South Africa's identity as an internationally respectable, successful, united and non-racial Rainbow Nation. As I indicated, this interpretation of the event was widespread and eagerly embraced by speakers across different racial and socio-economic backgrounds. Moving away from broader patterns of repetition to more detailed examination of variations and contradictions, we could see similar dynamics as those described in Chapter Five – including concerns about in- and exclusion- at work in the talk about the Rugby World Cup. While the event could be interpreted to serve a multicultural identity project, it could equally be interpreted along racialized lines, particularly because of the historically exclusive connotations of rugby as a 'white sport'. Indeed, several speakers were found to emphasize these exclusionary aspects and to be openly struggling with the ideological dilemma between racial redress and non-racialism as it manifests itself in sports. Across the board, however, what I found is that these dilemmatic issues lost their sharp edges in the euphoria of the confirming, positive event. Issues that could potentially be used to draw sharp, exclusive boundaries across the South African national community were reformulated to confirm the inclusive, non-racial boundary. A clear example of this tendency was the way in which most participants addressed the question of the historically unequal access to rugby for members of non-white communities. Rather than the more self-evident theme of exclusion, speakers across all groups used this topic to construct an image of inclusion: they emphasized how members of their own subgroup had experienced gaining a sense of ownership of the sports during the course of the Rugby World Cup. This way, the reconciliatory approach to the past that is characteristic of Rainbow Talk was upheld. The event also clearly had an inclusionary impact within the immediate context of the conversation. It proved to be a consensual theme in virtually all focus groups, with little debate and contestation. Similar to the findings discussed in Chapter Five, here, too, the non-mixed groups were the groups where speakers deviated most from the consensual picture. In this sense, the Rugby World Cup offered a very similar resource for a non-confrontational language between speakers of mixed background as the general Rainbow Talk did. This said, the most interesting finding within the talk on the Rugby World Cup was that it illuminated the prospective, future-oriented character of the inclusive Rainbow nation project. The idea that the Rugby World Cup

triumph was only a fleeting glimpse of the type of nation that South Africa aspires to be became very clear in the analysis of the focus-group interviews that were held in 2008.

As we have seen, the much more active discursive work that speakers had to do to make sense of these events against the backdrop of the prospective identity project of South Africa resulted in a wide range of different interpretations of the events or 'discursive strategies'. The xenophobic attacks most evidently challenged the international image of South Africa, the project of safeguarding inclusion of South Africa within the international community as a respectable member and a nation intent upon protecting human rights, in front of an international audience. It simultaneously challenged both multicultural, inclusive constructions of South Africa as ethnocultural, Africanist constructions. At the same time, paradoxically, xenophobia was shown to be a sinister mechanism for fostering national identity, because it gives substance to the inevitable 'Othering' that all constructions of similarity entail.

Many of the discursive strategies that I found were geared towards resolving these contradictions, for example through trivializing the attacks. Interesting within this analysis were the shifting categorizations of the African Other, ranging from positive to very negative within the same conversation. These demonstrated how the event impacted on the meanings given to the category of the 'Other', and how its boundaries were constantly redrawn. The event also brought to the fore some of the ideological dilemmas inherent in the self-conception of the new South Africa, for instance the dilemma between Africanism and exceptionalism.

In addition, I found speakers addressing the contradiction between the event and the internal dimension of South African national identity, through soul-searching questions about the characterization of South Africans as people, South Africa as a community and as a place. In all this talk, it was also clear how a particular event constitutes a different kind of resource for each speaker, intersecting with that person's position within society and the additional identity repertoires available to that person. The discursive work an event can do varies from one person to the next, and this intersects with people's positions. In this case, it was clear that the event of the xenophobic attacks – being an example of black-on-black violence – constituted a different type of resource for black speakers as it did for non-black speakers.

While the 2007 event had the effect of taking off the sharp edges of some of the dilemmas inherent within South Africa's ideological make up, the 2008 event did the opposite: it clearly brought underlying tensions to the foreground. An example was the

racialization of responses to the attacks and the way in which the event was used to construct clear racialized boundaries in Group 2.

The events brought the prospective character of the Rainbow project clearly into vision. The identity- affirming event of the Rugby World Cup can be seen as one step forward towards the prospective identity, but the identity-discrediting event of the xenophobic attacks as two steps back. To put it differently: the Rugby World Cup facilitated the construction of the prospective identity, while the xenophobic attacks significantly complicated it.

The effect of the events is that they 'do something' to the reproduction of the formal, official discourse; the formal discourse is placed in a different light by the events. In this sense, the events change the discursive space in which speakers construct their national identity. Speakers cannot ignore the events. They have to develop thoughtful and intelligent strategies to make sense of them in relation to the prospective identity project. This process is obviously more complex in the case of a discrediting event, such as the xenophobic attacks. This is why the 2008 transcripts manifested a lot more contestation and variations in terms of discursive strategies. This is also why in this chapter a lot more has been said about the 2008 transcripts than about those of 2007. At the end of the day, however, the prospective, future oriented Rainbow repertoire remained upright: a remarkable finding that I will reflect on in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.





## Chapter 7: Conclusions and discussion

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This final chapter is structured in three different parts. First, I will describe how my study has contributed to a fuller understanding of the dynamics of the process of national identification, particularly as it manifests itself in the talk of ordinary people. Second, I will address the insights the study provides concerning the process of national identification within the specific context of South African society, a young democracy undergoing a process of large scale social transition. Third, I will discuss how the insights obtained contribute to our understanding of processes of collective identification elsewhere, and how they could benefit persons working outside the field of academia. In the chapter on methodology, I have reflected extensively on the potential limitations and shortfalls in the ways in which my research project was set up and conducted. In addition to these points, I am aware of the caution that befits drawing conclusions from a small scale, qualitative study. Even though grand generalizations are not in place, I am firmly convinced that my study provides a rich and thorough analysis of an important phenomenon, and has implications for the study of similar processes elsewhere.

### **Contribution to theories on national identification**

In the introductory chapter, I described the phenomenon that grasped my attention at the time when I was conducting this research project. It was the way in which South African national identity seemed to develop across a highly erratic pattern in reaction to two critical events: the international sports triumph and the outburst of large scale xenophobic violence across the country. I witnessed the national mood peak and plummet within a short stretch of time, and was fascinated by what this might suggest about processes of national identification. How could it be, I wondered, that people can be 'overcome by nationhood' (Brubaker 1996) in one moment and manifest symptoms of a national identity crisis in the next? How do ordinary people make sense of these intense shifts in relation to their national identities? What does it tell us about the meaning of national identities? Do national identities, as common sense has it, tell us anything definite about the character of a national community, about the traits that members of a community share, or about the characteristics of a certain place? Or are they something completely different: the elusive, volatile and ambivalent products of social processes? And what to think about the question of identification specifically: how is it that individual

people identify themselves with whatever meanings of their nation circulate in the public domain at a given moment in time?

Scholarly literature on nationhood and national identity is characterized by an emphasis on the 'national' at the cost of attention to 'identity'. The 'traditional' literature on national identity fits in two categories. The first is the body of work that concentrates on political philosophical debates about the character of nations but entirely neglects the question of how ordinary persons come to identify with those nations on a daily basis. A question that has dominated this literature is which characterization fits the nation best: a primordial naturally grown, organic community or instead a rational, modernist response to broad macro-social developments. This is further marked by an emphasis on the political, the 'state'-dimension of the nation-state. The limitation of this focus is the suggestion that once the question of the definition of the nation is settled – once a nation's identity is 'accomplished' – national identity is something that people simply 'have'. It becomes something that can be measured. The wide range of quantitative surveys into national identification, either within countries or in international comparisons, is testimony to this perspective. This is the second category within national identity literature: a body of work that focuses on measuring the strength of people's national identification through large quantitative surveys. The problem with the latter approach is the assumption that the content of national identities is stable, unproblematic and understood in similar ways by all respondents in such surveys, thus allowing for measurements and comparisons across large samples. The picture we get is that once we shift the focus to the level of ordinary citizens the ambivalence over the character of nations – so present in the political philosophical literature – evaporates. What is missing is an insight into how processes of national identification unfold in practice, how the nation is given meaning on a continuous basis by individuals, and how ambivalence manifests itself at *that* level. If we instead shift the focus from identity as an entity to identification as a process, the idea of an unproblematic, unified, accomplished notion of national identity immediately breaks down.

In this dissertation I have developed a lens through which to analyze that process of national identification as it unfolds in practice, at the level of ordinary persons. My approach builds on insights from beyond the traditional literature on nationhood mentioned above. One classic study, Anderson's famous work on 'Imagined Communities' (originally published in 1983, reprint 2006) did offer a useful point of departure. His notion directs us to the realm of imagination, beliefs, ideas, discourse and the generation of meaning for the study of national identification. This basic idea proved very useful, but

what Anderson himself did not explore are the concrete processes through which this national imagining is carried out and sustained on a daily basis.

To begin to unpack those concrete processes, I drew on the broader literature on collective identification. Barth's social interactional perspective on the constitution of ethnic groups provided insights that could be extended to the study of national groups. Most valuable was his emphasis on the role of social actors themselves in categorizing themselves and others, and the idea of boundaries. To this, I added insights from later approaches (inter alia Cohen 1985) emphasizing the role of internal processes of shared meaning-making and symbolism within collective communities: the 'cultural stuff within the boundary'. Another important source was more recent post modernist literature, with its emphasis on the ways in which identities in the contemporary era are 'productions' – always in process, and closely linked to questions of representation (e.g. Hall and Du Gay 1996). It is also in this literature that the fragmented, ambivalent and ever dynamic character of identities is emphasized. From postmodernist work one gets the firm and convincing message that there will always be multiple and often conflicting ways of giving meaning to one and the same identity category.

Let us look back for a moment at the question of the collective shared content, the cultural stuff that represents the imagined national community. One important collective resource on nationhood are discourses formulated at a political level. These repertoires may acquire a degree of stability, of durability over a longer stretch of time. This said, political repertoires about the nation are intrinsically ideological; they construct a particular version of the nation as part of a particular political project. They present a particular version of the themes of people, time and place that serves this political project. It follows that they are open for contestation, and that competing ideological repertoires are available at the level of the collective resources. In Chapter Two, the three main ideologies of nationhood that feed into national narratives worldwide – ethnocultural, civic and multicultural nationhood – were discussed. It was also suggested that in practice, political narratives on nationhood are often composed of a combination of elements of these different ideologies. Narratives on the nation are thus never singular but will always compete with counter-narratives or be prone to internal contradictions. In addition, national narratives are bound to vary across time. This latter variability was emphasized by Brubaker when he argued for an 'eventful perspective' on 'nationness' (1996). In this perspective, nationhood is not something that develops gradually over time but something that 'crystallizes' in reaction to short-term dramatic events. Lastly, postmodernist works helped me to understand the important role of discourse, of

language, as central site for the production of collective identities. Indeed, large categorical identities such as national identity depend for a large part on 'the production of ways of speaking about them' (Calhoun 1997:48).

From these different works and disciplinary perspectives two of the key premises of my theoretical framework were derived: identities are constituted in processes of social interaction and in these processes language plays a central role. A further source of inspiration was the growing body of work on 'personal nationalism' that begins to fill the hiatus in the literature on the reproduction of nationhood at the level of everyday life, by ordinary people: an area that is gradually being covered by social psychological and anthropological work.

Billig's 1995 work on banal nationalism describes the everyday affirmation of national identity as an active process, and highlights how this is reinforced by what he calls banal symbolism: national flags, talk about the national 'we' and so on. Within anthropology, scholars have paid attention to the question of how 'the grand images presented by the leadership' are recast by ordinary persons 'in the more familiar terms of local experience' (Herzfeld 1993:49). Social psychologists introduced the term 'idiosyncratic remakes' to describe these individual, local appropriations of collective identities (Klandermans and De Weerd 2000:75).

Bringing all these insights together, a central element was still missing: an examination of how these processes play themselves out in practice. Even though Brubaker made the important call to study national identification as an eventful process, he did not empirically examine this proposition himself. Of the studies mentioned above, only Billig's work contains a concrete but small empirical study – examining the reproduction of the language of nationhood on the pages of British newspapers (Billig 1995:93). As Condor argues, almost all accounts of commonsense national representations rely on analyses of cultural texts (tourist brochures, national newspapers, political speeches, etc), but the analysis of the talk of ordinary people is neglected (Condor 2000:180).

The aim of my study was not only to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework of processes of national identification. It was also, and most importantly, to empirically examine how these processes unfold in practice, at the level of ordinary people and how meanings vary across persons and across time. If we focus on identification as a verb, we must focus on where the action is. If nations are reproduced by people talking about their nation, that is where the focus of the empirical analysis should be. What fascinated me specifically about national identity talk is how expressions of national identity are

simultaneously composed of collective, shared repertoires and individual, idiosyncratic elements. National identity talk is never a neat, unproblematic reproduction of the collective, ideological repertoires. The reproduction of these collective repertoires is always flavoured by the immediate, local context of an utterance at the moment of their discursive instantiation. Every individual expression of identity is made up of a patchwork of collective and idiosyncratic elements, and inherently variable across different persons. It is this complex interplay between the collective and the individual – between situated, local constructions of meaning and their wider societal context – that I have tried to grasp in the analysis in this dissertation.

If constructions of identity are variable across persons and across time, talk about the nation can be expected to reflect that variability. To address this variability across time, I have taken up Brubaker's notion of an 'eventful perspective' on national identification and developed it further within an empirical research setting. The usefulness of an eventful perspective is that it helps us to recognize that the collective resources for national identity talk at the macro-social level consist of more than just carefully formulated political repertoires. People may draw on a wide variety of resources in their national identity talk, and these may include sudden events and developments at the macro-social level. National identity talk is highly responsive to sudden critical events that happen at the macro-social level and that in some way or another invoke questions of national identity. Such events are as much part of collective resources for identity talk as are the more durable, political and ideological repertoires, but they differ from the political repertoires in their suddenness and their unpredictability. If we truly want to grasp the complex interplay between the collective and individual, idiosyncratic elements that feed into identity talk we need to include the question of immediate events in the analysis. We need to ask ourselves how events of the moment impact on constructions of national identity, how individuals incorporate these events in their talk, and how constructions of national identity shift in the light of different, unfolding events. In other words: we need to apply an eventful perspective to processes of national identification.

Within the literature on nationhood and national identity, there are a few studies that have taken this next step to examine national identity talk in detail and in context. This is particularly in the field of social psychology; the works of Reicher and Hopkins (2001), Condor (2000, 2010), Condor and Abell (2006) and Wodak et al. (2009) are cases in point. Within sociology, this type of approach is rare, and many of the existing works are situated in the context of the United Kingdom (for instance Bechhofer et al. 1999, Kiely et al. 2001, 2005, Fenton 2007). Beyond the specific issue of national identity, however,

there is a wider social psychological literature on the construction of identity categories in talk. The field of critical discursive psychology – including studies on the production of racial (Wetherell and Potter 1992, Wetherell 2003) and ethnic identity categories (Verkuyten and de Wolf 2002) – offers interesting insights into the production of identities in talk. Within the specific South African context, the works of Steyn (2001 and 2004) and Steyn and Foster (2008) served as important sources of inspiration. This wide range of works helped me to develop an approach for the analysis of the construction of national identities in talk. Reicher and Hopkins' 2001 work clearly demonstrates the variability of national identity construction across people and across time, labelled respectively 'synchronic' and 'diachronic' variability by the authors. They demonstrate how the same politician forwards a different version of the Scottish nation at various occasions, because he or she is mobilizing different constituencies at each occasion. Critics might argue that this finding is not surprising in a study of the talk of politicians, as they can be expected to strategically adjust their accounts to different audiences. But other works mentioned here, such as Condor's 2000 work, suggest that strategically tuning an account to a given context is as much part of the talk of ordinary speakers as it is of politicians.

To understand these dynamics, the idea of identity claims as actions upon the world proved helpful, and this idea takes a central place in my analysis. Instead of analyzing what an identity utterance reveals about a person's stable, internally felt attitude about his or her nation, we need to ask ourselves why a person would choose to formulate his or her national identity in a particular way at a particular moment. Critical discursive psychology departs from the assumption that individuals actively pick and choose from collectively available resources to compose a version that best suits the demands of a particular conversational context and audience. Analyzing the work that identity claims accomplish in context involves mapping out the broader macro-social context and the different ideological repertoires about the nation. It also involves examining how momentary, critical events feed into identity talk. The key point about events is to recognize that they too are open to multiple interpretations, and can be framed in particular ways to serve particular identity projects. The action orientation can thus be applied as much to the interpretation of events as to the reproduction of collective resources. But, importantly, the analysis must also include an examination of the immediate conversational context.

In this dissertation I have applied this approach to the analysis of a substantial body of interview material on South African national identity. My empirical study differs from the

work of Reicher and Hopkins because of its focus on ordinary speakers, in this case, young people. It is also different from Condor's work in that all material is collected through focus groups. Following the premise that identities are constructed in processes of social interaction, I deliberately chose focus groups for my data collection. This way, I was able to capture complex processes of talk-in-interaction within groups, and this generated rich and complex insights into the ways in which speakers constantly tune their accounts to the immediate context and the audience present. Another feature that distinguishes my study is the temporal dimension. Because I collected interview talk with the same groups of people at two distinct moments in time, I was able to assess the variability of identity expressions not only between different persons but also between different moments in time.

## **Theoretical implications of the empirical analysis**

In Chapters Five and Six, I described the specific empirical findings of the study in great detail. In this concluding chapter I will highlight the broader implications that can be derived from this study for our understanding of the process of national identification. First of all, my study demonstrates the validity of the constructivist perspective on national identification. Narratives on nationhood can rightly be regarded as ideological myths, aimed at promoting a particular version of the social world. Nationhood in itself goes unquestioned, and speakers almost automatically produce the building blocks of national narratives in terms of people, time and place. The interesting part of the analysis begins when we explore the particular meanings they give to these themes, and the ideologies informing these meanings.

The narrative or ideology on South African national identity that unquestionably emerged as dominant from this study was Mandela's narrative of South Africa as a Rainbow Nation, with its subthemes of non-racialism, unity in diversity, equality and new patriotism. Even though within public and political debate competing narratives are clearly available, at the level of the ordinary talk collected here the Rainbow narrative went by and large unchallenged. My study clearly demonstrates how the repertoires formulated at a political level trickle down to the level of vernacular talk. In this sense, the distinction between formal and informal – or political and personal – nationalisms seems artificial: the two spheres are undeniably mutually reinforcing.

In terms of organizing people's talk about their nation, the Rainbow narrative can thus be regarded as successful. Importantly, this is not to imply that it is also successful in bringing into effect a society along the lines of the discourse – a point to which I will



return in greater detail below. Instead, the narrative is about a society that is being aspired to, it is a prospective project, and not a description of reality as it is. This came out clearly in the study of the interplay between the two events and national identity talk, which will also be addressed below.

The strong presence of a collective repertoire about the nation tells us something important about national identity construction. It is through a successful myth that expressions of national identity acquire a degree of stability across persons and across time. Postmodernists have rightly challenged the idea of a stable, fixed essence for collective identities. But in their emphasis on eternal fragmentation and flux they have neglected the stability that results from strong, successful national narratives that have nestled themselves within a nation's common sense. This stability has nothing to do with essentialist truths or the innate character of the nation in question. What it does is confirm the constructivist idea about the strength of nationhood as an ideology, and the ways in which a successful ideology that manages to touch the right chord with ordinary people may become a durable, internalized building block of national identity that is able to stand the test of time. This is possible as much for narratives based on ethnocultural nationalism as it is for those based on civic nationalism or, in the case of South Africa, multicultural nationalism. In the process, reified qualities may be attributed to the national narrative and come to be seen as a description of the way the world actually is.

The study also demonstrates how the Rainbow narrative in itself is clearly an action upon the world. It is an ideological project intended to promote a particular kind of society: a broad, inclusive society that allows for a sense of belonging for South Africans across different racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. A central function that the narrative fulfils is of ensuring inclusion. The idiosyncratic remakes manifest themselves when we start to look at the specific stakes different speakers have in inclusion. Depending on a person's position within society, these stakes have been shown to be different. In the same vein, the question of what a speaker fears to be excluded from is variable. For the black African speakers in this study, for instance, exclusion from the national community is not so much the main threat but instead exclusion from their own black African community. Inclusion is never a given for any speaker, but a successful narrative offers a flexible solution to each. In the process, elements of the narrative might be redefined in order to serve these idiosyncratic interests. In the case of the Afrikaner speakers we saw how unity in diversity was given a distinct meaning in order to serve the interest of protecting language and cultural rights. The strength of the narrative is that it is able to accommodate these various different projects and still be upheld as a consistent

whole. Indeed, its success is that it offers that ‘umbrella of similarity uniting an otherwise very heterogeneous group of people’ (Jenkins 2008:134). The Rainbow narrative is successful in structuring ordinary speakers’ national identity talk across different racial groups.

The Rainbow narrative also serves to promote a particular image of South Africa on the international stage, or, in the language of inclusion: to include South Africa as a respected member of the international family of nation-states. This process of international positioning is equally dynamic and shifts in accordance with the rhetorical interests of the speaker. Here, too, the Rainbow narrative proved to be flexible enough to be adjusted to a wide range of identity projects.

One point – again – needs firm emphasis here: my study examined the ways people *talk* about their national identity. We must not fall into the trap of drawing conclusions about inner feelings of identity and belonging on the basis of a study of discourse. If the Rainbow narrative is the dominant narrative in my respondents’ talk, this by no means implies that my respondents *feel* like ‘Rainbow People’ (Moller, Dickow and Harris 1997). We should be cautious when drawing conclusions about people’s lived realities, and whether the values of the Rainbow narrative – non-racialism, unity, equality, reconciliation – are actually ‘experienced’ in practice. On the contrary, as we have seen, the somewhat formalistic reproductions of the Rainbow narrative were often contradicted by accounts of everyday experiences. It is these contradictory dynamics that allowed us to identify the strongly prospective character of the national identity talk: it is talk about the type of country South Africa is aspiring to be, rather than a description of South Africa as it is.

In Chapter Five, we already saw evidence of tensions between the type of society the narrative promotes and everyday experiences speakers refer to that attest to feelings of exclusion. That discrepancy became even more prominent in the analysis in Chapter Six that focused on the two events. The main finding was that the events either facilitated or hindered the identity project of the Rainbow narrative. The events changed the discursive field in which national identity is constructed, by shedding different light on the available resources. When comparing the talk of 2008 with that of 2007, the key thing to note was that there was a lot more ‘going on’ in the 2008 discussions. The talk about the xenophobic attacks took up significantly more space in the conversation, triggered very lengthy responses, and a lot more contestation and debates within each of the focus groups. In short, speakers had to do a lot more ‘discursive’ work to incorporate the event of the xenophobic attacks in their accounts about South African national identity. Most

important for the overall argument of this dissertation was what the analysis in Chapter Six revealed about the character and workings of ideological repertoires about the nation. More strongly even than the Rugby World Cup, the xenophobic event brought to the fore the prospective, future-oriented character of the Rainbow project, and the gap between that project and perceptions of everyday reality. The eventful perspective and the research set-up brought this future orientation into full focus. Evidence for this was found directly in the data, in the statements of several speakers who were suggesting that ‘this is not the nation South Africa is supposed to be’.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate the unrelenting strength of a successful ideological repertoire about nationhood, even in the face of events that clearly and evidently contradict these repertoires. The clear pattern in all focus groups was that, despite the contestation, the varying interpretations of the event and the complex discursive work that had to be done, the majority of speakers regrouped around the consensual project identity of South Africa as an inclusive Rainbow Nation towards the end of the conversation. The prospective identity project of South Africa as a Rainbow Nation, I suggest, served as a compass giving direction in times of upheaval caused by critical events.

This empirically based finding offers a novel contribution to our understanding of national identification. It implies that successful national narratives must have a dual quality: they must offer a degree of stability across time and a strong direction for the future, but they must simultaneously be malleable and flexible enough to be appropriated in idiosyncratic ways and to be maintained in the face of critical events of the moment. They must be available for individuals as resources in order to accomplish their interests in national identity talk under circumstances of change and flux. We have seen in this study that a good set of thematic building blocks for national identity offers a fairly durable set of resources that may stand the test of time. The narrative holds despite critical events, and events are assessed in relation to the dominant narrative. This resonates with what scholars have suggested about the need for national identities to be cast in the language of continuity, while being able to tactically respond to changing situations (Brown 2000:19).

Another key point in the data analysis was the clear confirmation of the idea that individuals are strategic agents, who skilfully adjust their accounts to a context. In my study, they were found to be actively engaging with and interpreting events in order to pursue their identity projects. If need be, they shifted from one end of the identity spectrum to the next in order to attune their accounts to the demands of the moment.

This is a different picture from the idea of people suddenly being 'overcome with nationhood', as suggested in the article by Brubaker. The data suggest that people are actively aware of the socially constructed nature of identity categories, confirming similar findings of Reicher and Hopkins (2001) and Condor (2000). Ordinary speakers understand the potential of discourses on nationhood very well, and they use it cleverly to advance their own cause. Their identity claims are as much projects that forward particular versions of the world as are the claims of politicians. They are also aware of the ideological dilemmas that are part of the discourse on South African nationhood, and they are skilfully managing these dilemmas in their talk. Indeed, the contrary themes of common sense represent the materials through which people can argue and think about their lives (Billig et al. 1988:8). This insight about the agency of individuals also speaks to the broader sociological debate on structure versus agency, formulated as follows by McCrone:

Is our identity conveyed by the social and political structures which are the frames within which we operate, or do we have greater capacity to choose these frames and move between them? (McCrone 1998:34).

Based on this study, the answer would be the latter. My study clearly demonstrates how processes of national identification are characterized by the complex interplay between collective resources generated at the macro social or political level, and the idiosyncratic reproductions of individuals. The emphasis is on agency; speakers are not simply positioned by collective discourses but are actively using them for their own benefit, in ways that serve their own specific interests within a particular context.

A specific insight emerged from the use of focus groups as the method of data collection: in the South African context the Rainbow narrative has acquired a normative, imperative quality. This dimension could only be discovered by zooming in on the details of the conversational interactions within the groups. In this analysis it became clear how deviating from the normative discourse was problematic for participants. Speakers were clearly struggling to formulate their points of critique on the Rainbow nation in acceptable terms. In some instances, they were immediately corrected or silenced by other members of the group. The Rainbow narrative thus has not only become commonsensical, it has also become normative. More generally, expressions of national pride and patriotic sentiment seem to be normative in the South African context (Eaton

2006:364).<sup>59</sup> It is plausible that survey studies – which are restricted to registering the first reaction of a respondent on the question of national identity – fail to capture this normative dimension. Qualitative interviews are able to probe beyond that first, socially desirable answer and explore the ambivalences and negotiations underneath. Because my interviews were held in a focus-group setting, I was able to analyze how this norm operated within the immediate social context of groups of South Africans of various backgrounds. This analysis further helps to illuminate our understanding of how contexts impact on national identity talk, especially the immediate social context of a group conversation – a question only marginally addressed in the literature on focus groups to date (with the exception of Hollander 2004). One-on-one interview settings would have been unable to bring this dimension so clearly to the foreground.

## **Implications for understanding national identity in South Africa**

I began this study with a description of the highly erratic pattern that national identification and the ‘national mood’ in South Africa seemed to follow. The overall impression that emerged from the interview material of both 2007 and 2008 was indeed one of South African national identity construction being indissolubly linked to immediate events. Identity construction follows a capricious pattern, moving from one positive event via a negative event on to the next positive event. In other words: South African national identity is intrinsically eventful. Towards the end of the 2008 conversations, the topic that overshadowed the debate was the next anticipated critical event: the 2010 Soccer World Cup. That upcoming event was constructed as an opportunity for South Africa to confirm its prospective identity even more than the Rugby World Cup had done. While a handful of speakers were worried about the Soccer World Cup in the light of the xenophobic attacks, most believed it would firmly establish South Africa as a hospitable, successful, respectable, united and non-racial nation. In doing so, it would have the potential to annihilate the negative impact of the 2008 event. This unrelenting optimism could be interpreted as a hopeful sign for South Africa and for the chances for success of the nation-building project underway in that country.

At the same time, I have emphasized above that the dominance of the Rainbow narrative should not be taken as a measure of the sense of inclusion experienced in the everyday

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<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, Condor’s work has shown the exact opposite for expressions of British patriotic sentiment. She concludes that ‘it seemed that respondents were hesitant about articulating positive accounts of their country which they oriented to as potentially hearable as chauvinistic prejudice’ (2000:193).

realities of these young South Africans, let alone the broader communities around them. In a similar vein, it should not be taken as evidence that the South African nation-building project has been successfully accomplished. If we read the accounts of these young focus group participants carefully, we see that they reflect the complexity of life in post-apartheid South Africa at a critical moment in its history, characterized by the power struggle between Mbeki and Zuma.

We also see that this generation, despite being 'born free', is not in any way 'free' from the historical legacies that continue to mark their everyday environments. For one, the voices of the generations before them repeatedly 'take the stage' when references to parents are made (and they are made frequently!). Optimistic, proud, forward looking and unitary accounts are interspersed with expressions of concern, insecurity and fatalism. A number of different factors give rise to these insecurities; most of them have been discussed in Chapter Three. To a certain extent, anxiety is fuelled by trends at the level of public discourse, such as the trend towards stigmatizing, exclusive discourses that manifests itself for example in the controversial accounts of former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema. More significantly, however, are the more structural conditions within South Africa that will continue to present a serious challenge to the nation-building project; the extraordinary socio-economic inequality being the first and foremost among these. The ticking time-bomb under the nation's stability is not racial antagonism, but it is the still unacceptably wide gap in living standards between the rich and the poor. In a recent, critical work on South Africa's economic policy Hein Marais speaks of a country 'pushed to the limit' (2011). The South African government cannot but address the urgent situation of the vast amount of South Africans living under the poverty line. As Gevisser argues, there is a 'crisis of expectation' among the nation's poorest (2009:2). But doing this requires drastic measures for redistribution, measures that are interpreted and perceived as threatening by the previously advantaged minority (and, as we have seen, also by the previously disadvantaged Indian and 'Coloured' communities). This constant, almost impossible balancing act between redistribution and reconciliation is the most important contradiction that runs through the new South Africa. At their core, most concerns and anxieties that are reflected in the accounts of my respondents have to do with this contradiction. Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of my respondents felt that the time for affirmative action was over – whether they were white learners in well-equipped schools or black African learners in the impoverished township schools. However, it is significant to emphasize that my study was limited to learners in urban schools. Two important groups of young people are not represented in my study: young people in rural areas and young people that have not made it to secondary schools at all,

‘school drop-outs’ or those that have never had the opportunity to attend school (orphans, street children). Even though I spoke to young people across different class backgrounds, all of them had opportunities the opportunities offered by education.<sup>60</sup>

The contradiction between reconciliation and redistribution will not be resolved in the short term, as the transformation of the socio-economic situation requires cautious, incremental and long-term policies. Observers to the left of the spectrum are sceptical about the poverty gap being resolved at all, against a backdrop of dominant global capitalism and the neo-liberal path that post-apartheid governments have followed (Marais 2011). Despite promises to substantially address the plight of the poor, the current President Zuma has not introduced any fundamental changes in the economic policies pursued by his predecessors. Rather than being resolved, this contradiction is thus bound to remain a defining feature in both South African experiences and in the discourse on nationhood. For the time being, the Rainbow narrative appears to be strong enough to hold despite this contradiction, but for how long? Noteworthy in the interview material was also the strong presence of Nelson Mandela as a key point of reference. It remains to be seen what the strength of the Rainbow narrative will be in a post-Mandela era.

The second contradiction that is likely to remain part of the South African discourse on nationhood relates to the position of South Africa in Africa, a position that is fraught with ambivalence. It is in the hostility towards African non-nationals – documented to be widespread across South Africans of all racial and class backgrounds – that the malign face of nationalism rears its ugly head (Croucher 1998). One phenomenon particularly struck me in the analysis of the focus-group discussions: the multiple ways in which speakers attempted to downplay or trivialize the xenophobic attacks. Theoretically – and to the outside observer – the contradiction between the identity narrative of the new South Africa and the event of the xenophobic attacks seemed flagrantly obvious. In reality, the picture was not so clear-cut, and the accounts of my respondents attest to this complexity. Many speakers managed to uphold the Rainbow image in the face of the attacks. Here, too, the Rainbow narrative proved to be flexible enough to accommodate even an event that directly challenged its founding values. We saw that in addition to the Rainbow narrative, the event triggered another familiar discourse on South African identity: that of exceptionalism. The two narratives appeared to be compatible and speakers employed resources from both in their making sense of the attacks.

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<sup>60</sup> This said, it is well known that large numbers of South African matric graduates remain unemployed despite their qualifications.

As we have seen in Chapter Two, discourses on national identity – and more broadly, on collective identity – are about the simultaneous construction of similarity and difference. Even in the inclusive Rainbow narrative that has diversity as its key organizing principle, diversity is not unconditional. Diversity is tolerated among those who are ‘autochthons’ – autochthons in the South African case being equated with South African born citizens. In this case, autochthony is not based on ethnocultural markers – as is the case in other parts of the world – but on civic markers.<sup>61</sup> What we see here is that the inherent dynamics of nationhood always include a form of differentiation on a particular level, and even a nation aspiring to a broad inclusive national identity project is not immune to scapegoating and ‘Othering’.

All these observations attest, again, to the strength of the Rainbow narrative – critical, negative events do not fundamentally alter the identity project aspired to for the future. They only alter the discursive resources that can be used to promote this project. The discursive construction of South African national identity thus clearly follows a pattern of ebb and flow, with one event minimizing contradictions and the next illuminating them, capriciously shifting across short spans of time. A question for discussion is whether this type of pattern is specific to the context of a nation-state with a short collective history, a transitional society that has only recently embarked upon the project of building a united nation like South Africa. Indeed, we could imagine that events have a stronger impact in a context where there is little inclusive collective history and more space for events to become moments of history-in-the-making. The 1995 Rugby World Cup triumph certainly has become such a moment in post-apartheid South Africa’s collective history. In a longer-established nation-state, it is less likely that a similar event would acquire such a status. Possibly, the pattern of ebb and flow is more explicit, and the volatility of national identification more visible in such a young nation-state. It is also highly possible that the strategic, future orientation of the national identity project is more pronounced in a context where the past is divided and offers no resources for a sense of collectiveness. As Alexander (2003) argues, in a country in transition, it matters a great deal which discourse is chosen.

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<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, most of the victims of the 2008 attacks could be seen as ethnoculturally close to their South African aggressors. For an interesting analysis of the socio-emotional dynamics of what has been labelled the ‘Afrophobia’ of South Africans, see Matsinhe 2011.



The fact that the Rainbow narrative is so clearly prospective does not in any case diminish its strength. By contrast, it remains resilient, and available to people in the face of the erratic pattern. It serves as a discursive guiding framework that people fall back on at the end of the conversations. A question for debate is whether the optimistic Rainbow project will be able to survive a longer series of negative, identity-discrediting events. In the timeframe that I studied, positive events alternated with negative events, with another positive event (the 2010 World Cup) already looming on the horizon. The question is how the optimistic narrative will fare in the face of a series of negative events.

Another factor that is possibly impacting on the findings of this study is its focus on the members of a particular generation, the 'born free'. Is the tendency to end on a positive note and hold on to an optimistic future perspective something typical to a generation that is at the threshold of adulthood, with the future lying wide open in front of them? Specifically with regard to the South African context: is there a process at work by which the 'born free' generation 'internalized' the weight of expectation placed upon them by powerful actors in society (political leaders, their elders)? Does the task of becoming the generation that 'makes the new South Africa work' trickle down in the ways in which these young people talk about their nation? As stated already in the introduction, how appropriate is the term 'born free' when a generation carries both the legacy of the past and the weight of future expectations on its shoulders? These are poignant questions for discussion and interesting leads for further research. An evidence-based answer to these questions is not possible at this point. However, the mere fact that the optimistic Rainbow narrative is the dominant framework that organizes these young persons' national identity talk is in itself significant. As Jenkins argued, when people collectively identify themselves and others, and conduct their lives in terms of those identities, those identities become intersubjectively real and have practical consequences (Jenkins 2008:111). When a particular discourse on our social world and the relations between people within that world becomes dominant in structuring our talk, it has become meaningful as a framework through which we look at the world. A framework that might – ultimately – become tangible and real in its consequences. Indeed, when phrased in an inclusive way, ideologies on nationhood might become the 'glue' that holds fragmented, segregated and diverse societies together, enabling an idea of 'deep horizontal comradeship' across members of a national community (Anderson 2006). Scholars have emphasized the importance of such 'glue' in the case of South Africa (Brown 2001; Chidester et al. 2003). The potential of inclusive repertoires about nationhood is that when they become meaningful for people, they can become a source of hope for future

progress. They can motivate a commitment to stay in a country, generate a sense of belonging and foster social cohesion.

## **Implications for studying collective identification elsewhere**

In the introduction, I described how contemporary debates across the globe are dominated by questions about belonging and in- and exclusion. What are the implications of the insights from this study for processes of national– or more generally collective identification elsewhere?

At the level of scholarship, the analysis developed in this thesis of the dynamics of national identification as it unfolds in concrete practices – in this case discursive practices – can be translated to the study of processes of collective identification elsewhere. Whether the focus is on national, ethnic or any other categorical collective identity, the dynamic interplay between collective repertoires and idiosyncratic remakes is applicable in each of these processes. The action-oriented approach offers a useful method to examine why speakers articulate their collective identities in the way that they do. Whether it is in the case of young South Africans or second-generation immigrants in Western-Europe, whether the talk is about national or subnational identities, in each of these processes our analysis can be advanced by posing the question of ‘why this utterance here’? Why does this person choose to formulate this identity in this particular way in this context? What could be at stake here? What could be the impact of the audience on how the speaker constructs his identity? The eventful perspective can also be applied to different contexts. What is the interplay between events of the moment and constructions of national identity? This way, we begin to breakdown the commonsensical notion that identities are essentialist, unchangeable items that we carry with us and that we reproduce unproblematically.

For policymakers working more concretely on questions of integration and cultural diversity, it can be insightful to approach identity positions from this angle and to emphasize the agency of individuals. That approach helps us to see potential for change, for the shifting of positions, the transcending of dividing lines, even in the most rigid of all identity conflicts. For at their core, all processes of identification are dynamic and contextual. This might contribute to taking the sting out of the identity politics that paralyze so many debates on belonging in nation-states across the globe.

A final comment needs to be made on the specific context of South Africa. On the one hand – as we have heard so often in relation to South Africa – the national context is

unique in several respects, the most important reason obviously being the transitional dimension emphasized above. The discursive space for the construction of identities in South Africa opened up post-1994, and a radically new narrative on nationhood was possible and necessary. This description is oversimplifying the immense baggage from the past weighing upon this process, baggage that we have seen continues to greatly challenge the project. But the core point here is that in the South African case a new, fresh nation-building project was embarked upon, something that is not applicable to nation-states in Western-Europe that are wrestling with their identities. This opened the way for South Africa to formulate a broadly inclusive narrative that perhaps befits the contemporary era better than the narratives that developed over time in its Western European counterparts. These latter narratives might be more straightforward, but they are also commonly infused with ethnocultural elements that lack the flexibility of the Rainbow narrative. Would it not be interesting if these 'established' nation-states take up the challenge to redefine their dominant discourses on nationhood all together? If, instead of polishing up old, reactionary versions, they would start from scratch, taking their changed societies as a starting point?

For despite increasing global ties, transnational connections, and redefinitions of the concept of place, the language of nationhood remains by and large unquestioned as a dominant framework in the organization of our social worlds. To quote from Calhoun: 'As moderns we are all participants in the discourse of nations, whether we like it or not' (Calhoun 1993:214). Where the room for manoeuvre is, is at the level of the meanings we attribute to national identities.

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